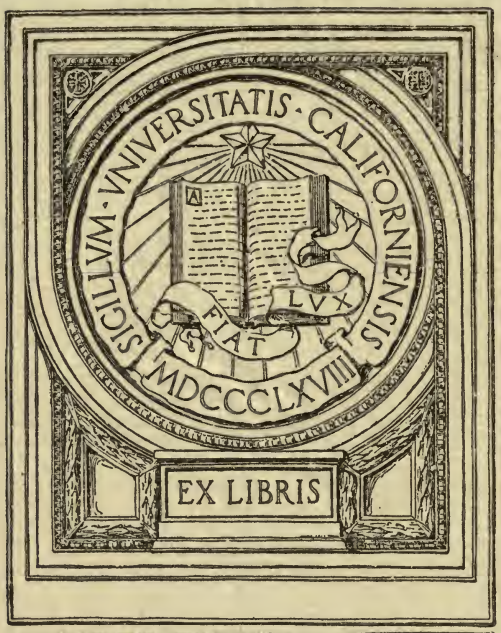

SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · CALIFORNIENSIS
LVX
FIAT
MDCCCLXVIII
EX LIBRIS

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/tragedyofarmylav00taylrich

THE TRAGEDY OF AN ARMY:

LA VENDÉE IN 1793

Henri, Comte de Larochejacquelein.

93.

THE TRAGEDY OF AN ARMY: LA VENDÉE IN 1793

:: :: By I. A. TAYLOR :: ::

Author of "Madame Roland," "Queen Hortense and Her Times," "Queen Christina of Sweden," etc.

"La Vendée est une plaie qui est une gloire."—VICTOR HUGO

With a photogravure plate, 8 other illustrations, and a map

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

London : HUTCHINSON & CO.
Paternoster Row :: :: :: 1913

DC218
T2

UNIV OF
CALIFORNIA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

March

The Republic in danger—The levy of 300,000 troops—The Vendean peasant, his character and principles—Different estimates of him as a soldier—The part played by religion in the war—The Vendean's love of home . . . . . pp. 1–10

CHAPTER II

March

The scene of the war—Vendean methods—La Vendée in 1791—Character of the people—Rising and massacre at Machecoul—Charette, leader in Lower Vendée . . . . pp. 11–22

CHAPTER III

March

The outbreak in Upper Vendée—Cathelineau—Stofflet—Sapinaud—Chollet attacked—And taken . . . . pp. 23–33

CHAPTER IV

March–April

Royalist successes—Joseph Cathelineau's deposition—Incidents of the struggle—Republican measures—Marcé's defeat—The Easter peace—Scenes at Chollet—Reassembling of the peasants—Sapinaud's forebodings . . . . . pp. 34–47

274855

CHAPTER V

April

The royalist armies—Their leaders—Bonchamps—d'Elbée—Berruyer's defeat—His description of the Vendean peasants—His recall—Royalist reverses—Appearance of La Rochejacquelein upon the scene . . . . . pp. 48–56

CHAPTER VI

April

The Château of Clisson—Its host and his guests—La Rochejacquelein leaves it to join the royalists—His success—Republican disorganisation—Vendean triumphs—Treatment of prisoners—The Lescures in confinement—Panic amongst the Blues pp. 57–67

CHAPTER VII

May

Lescure joins the fight—Young soldiers—The victory at Thouars—Release of Quétineau—The sham Bishop of Agra—Capture of La Châtaignerie—Defeat at Fontenay—Republican hopes—Second battle and victory at Fontenay . . . pp. 68–88

CHAPTER VIII

May–June

Lower Vendée and Charette—Lack of co-operation—The Superior Council—The Abbé Bernier—Policy of the Government—Biron in command—Royalist successes—Saumur taken pp. 89–106

CHAPTER IX

June

Alternatives considered — Nantes to be attacked — Cathelineau General-in-Chief—New recruits—The Prince de Talmont—Angers evacuated — Co-operation of Charette — Condition of Nantes—Its siege—Death of Cathelineau—Royalist defeat pp. 107–124

CHAPTER X

June–July

Biron's position—Westermann's successes—And defeat—Châtillon captured—Biron's fate—Rossignol and Ronsin—Battle at Vihiers—Royalist blunders—Divided authority—D'Elbée made commander-in-chief—Various estimates of him—Re-arrangement of the royalist forces . . . . . pp. 125–143

CHAPTER XI

July

Party strife—Death of Sapinaud—Republican heroism—Policy of destruction—The army of Mayence—Kleber—Tinténiac's mission—Negotiations with England . . . pp. 144–155

CHAPTER XII

August–September

Royalist defeat at Luçon—Recriminations—Fitful successes—Republican measures—Divided authority—Rossignol suspended—And reinstated—A republican protest . . pp. 156–170

CHAPTER XIII

September

Charette driven from Légé—Royalists in council—Victory at Coron—Junction of Charette with the Grande Armée—Victory at Torfou—Montaigu retaken—Change of plans . pp. 171–182

CHAPTER XIV

September–October

Capture of Saint-Fulgent—Charette abandons the Grande Armée—Bonchamps' reverse—Republican successes—Canclaux and other generals superseded—Offer made by the Mayençais—Léchelle commander-in-chief—Châtillon taken and retaken pp. 183–195

CHAPTER XV

October

Changes in the Grande Armée—Condition of Chollet—Lescure mortally wounded—Desolation in the country—Chollet evacuated—Royalists rally at Beaupréau—Battle and defeat of the royalists at Chollet . . . . . pp. 196–211

CHAPTER XVI

October

The passage of the Loire—The prisoners saved by Bonchamps—His death—The army crosses the river . . . pp. 212–221

CHAPTER XVII

October

La Rochejacquelein made commander-in-chief—Republican hopes—Noirmoutiers captured by Charette—D'Elbée takes refuge with him—The Grande Armée starts for Laval—Order of the march—Laval reached . . . . . pp. 222–231

CHAPTER XVIII

October

Republican proclamations—Defeat of Westermann—Léchelle's ineptitude—Battle and victory of Laval—La Rochejacquelein as general—Léchelle's retirement and death—Kleber in command pp. 232–244

CHAPTER XIX

November

Divided counsels—Dissensions—Talmont—Lack of means—Republican methods—The royalist march—Fougères—Lescure's death—Breton recruits . . . . . pp. 245–257

CHAPTER XX

NOVEMBER

At Fougères—Obenheim—Emigrants—Envoys—Letter of the comte d'Artois—A Vendean peasant in London—March towards the coast—Failure of the siege of Granville—Talmont under suspicion—A constitutional Bishop . . pp. 258–273

CHAPTER XXI

NOVEMBER

Republican inefficiency—Last royalist successes—Victory at Dol—And at Antrain—Republican systematic slaughter—March towards the Loire . . . . . pp. 274–286

CHAPTER XXII

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER

March towards the Loire—Republican dissensions—Siege of Angers—Royalist defeat—Marceau in command—At La Flêche—Defeat at Mans—Flight to Laval . . . pp. 287–305

CHAPTER XXIII

DECEMBER

After Mans—Mademoiselle des Melliers—March towards the Loire continued—At Ancenis—Failure to cross the river—Desertions—At Savenay—Final dispersion . . . pp. 306–318

PRINCIPAL AUTHORITIES . . . . . p. 319

INDEX . . . . . pp. 321–325

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE TRAGEDY OF AN ARMY

CHAPTER I

March

The Republic in danger—The levy of 300,000 troops—The Vendean peasant, his character and principles—Different estimates of him as a soldier—The part played by religion in the war—The Vendean's love of home.

It was on March 10, 1793, that the smouldering discontent of La Vendée burst into flame, and the curtain rose upon what was to prove one of the most tragic and sanguinary episodes of the Revolutionary drama.

On that same 10th of March—it was a Sunday—the Convention had inaugurated at Paris its Revolutionary Tribunal. In January the execution of the King had taken place, and the Republic, so far as defiance of European opinion was concerned, had burnt its boats behind it. Public feeling abroad had been intensified by the death of the representative of monarchy; France stood single-handed at bay.

She was torn, besides, by internal dissension. As winter passed into spring the conflict—a conflict of life and death—between the Girondists, the idealists of the Revolution, and the men destined to replace them as pilots of the republican vessel, was nearing

its close. The triumph of the Mountain was soon to be the prelude of the Terror.

And whilst party animosities raged in the capital, the news daily reaching it from the frontier may well have seemed to render the situation desperate. The emigrants, supported by the coalition of the foreign powers, had raised on the Rhine the white flag described by a royalist as the shroud of the ancient monarchy;[1] disaster after disaster was reported; the French armies were falling back before the foreign invaders; Dumouriez, in chief command, had become suspect. It was no wonder that the word went forth declaring the country in danger, that the black flag floated from Notre Dame, that extraordinary measures of defence were felt to be necessary, and that a levy of 300,000 additional troops was decided upon.

Then, suddenly, whilst Paris was facing ruin, and reviewing, as calmly as the stress of the moment allowed, the possibilities remaining to her of averting destruction, suddenly came the news that a fresh danger menaced the Republic, that, in the district bounded on the north by the Loire, on the west by the sea—a tract of country containing not more than some eight hundred square miles—the peasantry had risen, in stubborn opposition to the decree that would have torn them from their homes to fight in a quarrel that was none of theirs and in defence of a government they abhorred. In vindication of their right to remain at least passive in the struggle that was going forward, the fierce inhabitants of the Vendean Marais bordering on the coast had joined with their inland neighbours; blood had been shed, and the peasants had taken up arms against a government

[1] *La Vendée Militaire*, Joly-Crétineau.

requiring them to leave their homes, their families and farms to serve under the republican banner.

Unprepared, spontaneous, the revolt was a peasants' revolt. In the larger and smaller towns alike, amongst the bourgeois or industrial classes, republican opinions were dominant; the inhabitants of the surrounding country were almost unanimously opposed to them. They wished for no change; they were content with their lot. Royalist as they were by tradition and sentiment, had the quiet routine of their lives been left undisturbed, they might have continued, as they had for the most part continued hitherto, quiescent. "God and the King" might be adopted as their war-cry; but in point of fact the Vendean peasant made little account of kings. It was a different issue that summoned him to fight.

Divided by nature and tradition from the rest of France, the unity of the nation—of so much moment to Paris—was nothing to him, and it was only faintly that echoes of the events convulsing the capital reached his ears. Had he been permitted to till his ground in peace; had the priests he trusted been left undisturbed, he would not have been deeply affected by the knowledge that the little heir of the long line of French kings was robbed of his heritage. That the nobles should be driven out of the kingdom was a matter of regret to him, but not of regret so keen as to stir him to action. "I care nothing for nobles," said a Vendean soldier to a republican prisoner; "I ask for no king, but we want our good priests."

These were his two dominating motives. He wanted his priests; he wanted, perhaps still more, to be left to live and die in the home where he had

been born and bred, and where his children were growing up. The electric shock which had passed through France when the people rose to claim their rights and those who sat in darkness had seen a great light, had passed him by unthrilled. What Victor Hugo said of the Breton peasant applies in its measure to his Vendean brother: "D'un côté la Révolution Française, de l'autre, le paysan Breton. En face de ces évènements incomparables, menace immense de tous les bienfaits à la fois, accès de colère de la civilisation, excès de progrès furieux, amélioration démesurée et inintelligible, qu'on place ce sauvage grave et singulier . . . et qu'on se demande si cet aveugle pouvait accepter cette clarté."

Being what he was, it was natural that the summons to take up arms in a cause to which he was indifferent and for the sake of rights he had never desired to vindicate should have found the Vendean peasant determined on resistance. There was a sturdy independence about him noticed by M. Jules Simon when he draws attention to the paradox that only in La Vendée and Brittany—the two provinces where royalism was least strong—was an army raised in its defence.[1] Notwithstanding its hatred for a republic whose objects and aims it did not comprehend, the district was in a sense republican at heart —republican in the assertion of the right of the individual to cleave to his own opinions and to his own faith. When France, as a whole, submitted to the despotism of the Committee of Public Safety, in La Vendée alone—so Michelet has pointed out—was resistance to be found. By no process of reasoned argument, nor by means of any propaganda, but by

[1] Preface to *Profils Vendéens*, Sylvanecte.

instinct and unconsciously, the Vendean peasant had grasped some of the leading principles proclaimed by the Revolution—the idea of personal liberty, and, in spite of the class distinctions he accepted as a matter of course, the idea of a true equality of man and man. "The Revolution," said Napoleon, "was right in proclaiming equality. The Vendean armies themselves were governed by that great principle—a principle by which France had been invaded and against which they daily fought."

This it is that explains the attitude they took up and their stubborn refusal to allow creeds, spiritual, political, or moral, to be imposed upon them by external authority. It is also the explanation of the fact that a Cathelineau or a Stofflet—both peasants—could stand shoulder to shoulder with a Lescure, a La Rochejacquelein or a Prince de Talmont. The leaders amongst the noblesse, no less than the peasants, were, almost to a man, Vendeans born and bred, and sharers in the Vendean traditions.

With regard to the conduct of the war, partisans on either side have been often misled by passion or prejudice. To royalists the Vendean peasant has come near to representing the type of the saintly soldier, fighting and dying in defence of the outraged honour of God and the King. To the republican, in spite of the admiration accorded to his magnificent courage, his endurance and loyalty, he has appeared in the light of brute force and unreasoning fanaticism, arrayed against the regenerating principles of a nation. It has often been forgotten that, on the one side as on the other, men were fighting for their dreams ; that, on the one side as on the other, more—far more—than mere material success

was at stake; that each fought as men who stand to win or lose all that makes life most worth having.

On the whole, it is the royalists who have, perhaps, had to complain least of injustice, at all events from posterity. There was that about their desperate struggle against overwhelming odds compelling the admiration of even those to whom the cause in which they fought was abhorrent. "Il est un point de la France," admits the ardent republican Michelet, "où le royalisme fut héroique—la Vendée"; and General Turreau, one of the most relentless of their antagonists, admits that, "with humanity and a better cause," his opponents would have united every heroic quality. "An inviolable attachment to their party; an unlimited confidence in their chiefs; so much faithfulness to their promises as to supply the want of discipline; an invincible courage, proof against every kind of danger, fatigue, and want—these are what make the Vendeans formidable foes"—such was the testimony of their ruthless enemy.[1]

For those dazzled by the heroism displayed by the peasants, it is easy to fall into injustice with regard to their conquerors. Difficult as it is to form a dispassionate judgment of heroes, it is perhaps still more difficult to judge impartially of men who contended with and vanquished them. Nor do the circumstances under which the combat took place render the task easier. When the eyes are fixed upon the local contest, it is natural to conceive the overwhelming force of the Republic brought to bear upon a single province and to overlook the fact that that Republic was at the moment fighting for its life, attacked at every vulnerable point, and that the

[1] *Mémoires*, Turreau.

foes of its own household had risen in this hour of extremest need and peril to second the efforts of the foreign enemy to destroy it. If it is fair that the foul deeds that were perpetrated should have obscured the nobler features of the struggle, it should not be forgotten that the cruelty of those melancholy months—so far as it was a thing apart from the lust of blood which, like a disease, had laid hold of Paris and infected the provinces—was in some measure the cruelty resulting from weakness and fear. If France was not to be defeated, if the work of the last few years was not to be destroyed, the sacrifices that had been made rendered useless, and the country brought once more under the old intolerable yoke, it was absolutely necessary that the rebellion should be crushed, that the foreign invader and the emigrant noble should not find allies and accomplices at home. Though the means taken to compass this end were wholly unjustifiable, as cruelty and brutality must ever be, it should, nevertheless, be remembered that when the Government made use of every weapon in its power to reduce La Vendée to submission it was repressing a force by which its very life was threatened.

These apologies may be made for the drastic measures taken by the authorities when first the rebellion broke out. For the wanton ferocity marking later stages of the struggle, more especially the terrible days when, north of the Loire, the Grande Armée was practically at the mercy of its conquerors, no such excuses can be urged; and the callous disregard of human suffering then shown has not often been equalled.

There is, however, another side to the picture.

It must not be forgotten that, though in a far less degree, the Vendean peasant was not free from the taint of cruelty, or that his heroic qualities, his loyalty, courage, and endurance were unhappily associated, more particularly in certain districts, with deeds of violence and bloodshed. It could scarcely have been otherwise. Not only did the horrors inflicted on the revolted provinces invite reprisals, but the natural, primitive passion of the peasant, roused in the contest, could not fail at times to break through the restraints imposed upon it.

If the immediate cause of the rebellion was the prospect of enforced military service at a distance from home, the war was also, in a measure, a war of religion. To what degree the Vendean priests were responsible for it is a much debated question. It cannot be doubted that, whether or not they had counselled active resistance, they had fostered in the minds of the peasants under their influence the spirit leading them to regard the Republic with hatred. By an unjustifiable invasion of the spiritual kingdom, by forcing upon the clergy the constitutional oath, the Government had most unfortunately turned into its sworn adversaries a body of men it would have been its wisdom and true policy to conciliate, and in the Vendean rebellion the consequences were reaped. The faith for which the peasants were willing and ready to lay down their lives was the faith of a child, and no less free from questioning or doubt. Their confidence in their spiritual guides, with respect to things touching on the spiritual kingdom, was implicit and boundless. "The Vendean," says Bodin, "believes and holds for certain only what is told him by his priests." This had been the tradition

of the province for centuries, resulting at times in singular anomalies. When, in the sixteenth century, a wave of Calvinism swept over the district, infecting the clergy themselves, the peasants, led by their priests, threw down the shrines and defaced the symbols of the ancient worship. Now, two hundred years later, with priests in their ranks, the Vendean peasant was eager to shed his blood in defence of the violated rights of the Catholic Church. "Ever religious, ever warlike, he sang hymns as he shattered the statues of the Virgin in 1565, in the same way that he sang litanies as, in 1793, he lifted up these same statues and fought republicans."

Over these men rank had comparatively little influence. "Otez le prêtre," says some one; "le noble disparait." Notwithstanding a friendly liking and respect for the local noblesse, and a strong desire to secure the services of men with experience of military affairs, it is significant that Cathelineau—who, "under the frieze of a peasant, had the heart of a hero and the piety of a saint"[1]—first filled the post of commander-in-chief of the Grande Armée, and was the idol of his comrades. The war was a peasants' war.

And when we think of the Grande Armée, of which the story is to be told here—of the wandering multitude, ill-armed, ill-clad, often hungry and thirsty, lacking the very necessaries of life as they marched on to fight after fight, singing as their war-song the hymn "Vexilla Regis," or telling their beads as they went, loyal, devoted, brave, sometimes fierce and cruel—when we try to picture this strange moving mass, the one great passion of their lives,

[1] *Mémoires de Madame de Sapinaud.*

ever vital, must always be borne in mind—namely, the love of home. That passion forgotten or overlooked, the key is lost to much of the history of these months. To assert their right to live in sight of the familiar landmarks they had taken up arms; in defence of their homes they were ready to fight and die; but as they fought, the longing to return to his own rooftree was ever present in each one of them. And when those homes had been laid waste, when fire and sword had done their work, then, from the country north of the Loire to which he had been driven the eyes of the Vendean peasant still continued to turn with invincible yearning towards the spot where he had been born and where he hoped, if he were not permitted to live, to find a grave. Even that solace was to be denied him, and the mass of the Grande Armée was to be overtaken by death in what was to it a foreign land. In that fact is contained a chief element of the tragedy of its fate.

CHAPTER II

March

The scene of the war—Vendean methods—La Vendée in 1791—Character of the people—Rising and massacre at Machecoul—Charette, leader in Lower Vendée.

To understand the course of the war and the successes marking its earlier phases, the nature of the country must be taken into account, with the facilities afforded to men born and bred in it to dispute every inch of the ground with the enemy.

The two districts of Upper and Lower Vendée had, like their inhabitants, little in common; Lower Vendée, adjoining the seacoast, was largely composed of marshland, whilst Upper and Central Vendée, where the operations of the Grande Armée were carried on, included the thickly wooded district called the Bocage.

This inland district was of rare beauty. Varied by hills and valleys, broken by gorges and ravines, it possessed an abundance of water, rivers and streams; with masses of woodland, fields and vineyards, the bulk of the population being scattered about the country in small isolated farms or cottages, enclosed either by hedges and ditches, or, in the more rocky localities, by walls of loose stones four or five feet high. The soil was productive, and it was an easy matter to earn a living by agricultural and pastoral labour. Granaries were full; wine—of indifferent quality—was plentiful, and what was

lacking to the needs of the peasants was supplied by the sale of their cattle. If luxury was unknown, poverty was rare. Communication with the outer world was infrequent, and modern ideas were slow to penetrate to the rural districts.

The few towns, as well as the larger villages, or bourgs, were mostly unpretentious and heterogeneous masses of buildings, with winding, ill-paved streets —often to be stained with blood during the coming months. The houses, of varying dimensions, were backed by large gardens; the smaller townships boasting no more than one or two chief thoroughfares, with rows of irregular buildings on either side, the other dwelling-places being scattered at haphazard amongst the surrounding gardens, each standing alone and communicating with the main streets only by narrow and tortuous paths.

There were many difficulties in the way of carrying on a successful campaign in this land of thick forests and rocks and rivers—difficulties incalculably enhanced when troops and generals alike were ignorant of the lie of the land, and were forced to rely upon uncertain information or surmise. To the republican general, Kleber, the country appeared a labyrinth, deep and dark, through which it was necessary to advance feeling, as it were, your way. Even the main roadways were mostly enclosed on either side, and should a stranger desire to cross from one to the other, he had first to discover the winding tracks leading through the woods. When found, they often proved no more than narrow cuttings impassable for any vehicle demanding more space than the carts of the countryfolk.

The use made by the peasants of these natural

advantages has been pointed out by Savary, himself a Vendean born.[1] The position of the enemy having been ascertained and an attack projected, the Vendean marksmen would lie in ambuscade behind the hedges or hidden in the ravines on either side of the approaching force, so that, when the encounter took place, fire could be opened upon them all along the line, small detachments of the rebels, gliding unseen to their rear, attacking them also from behind. A feature of these battles was the shouts and cries of the peasants. Proceeding from an enemy seen and invisible, they took powerful effect upon the nerves of the republican troops, frequently raw levies to whom war was a new experience. Behind the hedges or below in the ravines the Vendeans would run, keeping pace with the enemy and shooting as they went, the uncertainty as to their numbers, the continuous firing, and the terrifying cries at times creating something resembling an absolute panic amongst the Blues—the name usually applied to the republican troops. If, on the other hand, the latter were successful in repulsing an attack, the Vendeans, quick to avail themselves of their familiarity with the country, would disperse as if by magic—" all vanishing in a moment "—each man regaining his home independently by unfrequented paths, and remaining there to give his attention to his domestic affairs and the cultivation of the land until the tocsin should once again sound the call to arms.

When the rebellion broke out, it found the Republic unprepared to cope with it. Yet the Government had not been left without warning, the

[1] *Guerres des Vendéens et des Chouans*, Savary.

discontent in La Vendée having caused disquiet in Paris for some two years, and the spirit abroad amongst the rural population being shown, from time to time, by local riots. In 1791 it had also become known that suspicious gatherings of the nobles—not yet emigrants—had been held in certain districts, and the republican administration of Sables had testified its sense of possible danger by a demand for troops who would be ready to act in case of need. Invading armies were collecting upon the frontier, and it was feared that concerted action might be arranged between the foreign enemy and the disaffected in the western provinces.

Under these circumstances two commissioners—Gensonné, afterwards a prominent member of the Girondist party, and Gallois—were dispatched to La Vendée to inquire into the situation on the spot. Their report, marked by a tone of singular moderation, when the point of view of the writers is taken into account, was made to the Legislative Assembly in October:

"The date," they wrote, "when the ecclesiastical oath was to be taken, was the time at which the troubles in La Vendée first began. Before then, the people had enjoyed the greatest tranquillity. At a distance from the common centre of action and resistance, inclined by nature to love peace and order and to respect the law, they experienced the benefits conferred by the Revolution without having felt its storms. In the country, difficulty of communication, the simplicity of a purely agricultural life, the lessons of childhood, and the religious emblems constantly before their eyes, have laid their souls open to a number of superstitious beliefs, capable,

in the present state of things, neither of destruction nor modification by light of any kind. Religion, as they understand it, has become the strongest, and, so to speak, the sole moral habit of their lives. The most essential object it presents to them is the worship of images, and the minister of this worship is regarded by the inhabitants as the dispenser of heavenly favours. By the fervour of his prayers he can soften intemperate seasons, in his hands is the gift of happiness in a future life, and the sweetest and strongest affections of their souls unite in his favour. The constancy of the people of this department in their religious affections, and the boundless confidence placed in the priests to whom they are accustomed, are some of the principal elements in the troubles by which it has been disturbed, and which may again disturb it. It is easy to conceive the activity with which priests, either misled or factious, have been able to profit by those dispositions. Nothing that could inflame zeal, intimidate consciences, strengthen the weak, and support the determined has been neglected. Disquiet and remorse have been caused to some persons, to others hopes of salvation and happiness have been held out. On almost all the influence of attraction and fear has been successfully brought to bear. Many of these ecclesiastics are in good faith; they appear to be deeply penetrated both with the ideas they spread and with the sentiments they inspire. Others are accused of using the veil of religion on behalf of interests nearer to their hearts. These last moderate their political activity according to circumstances."

A copy was added of the instructions issued by the Bishop of Luçon to his clergy, enjoining on them to use every means in their power not only to continue

their own ministrations under present difficulties, but to impress upon their flocks the necessity of refusing to avail themselves of those of the *intrus* who had been forced upon them by the Government, a veritable schism being thereby created in every parish.

In the municipalities of the towns, small and scattered, a like division was noted, producing confusion in official matters. Many citizens refused to serve in the National Guard; whilst the men responsible for executing the law with regard to recalcitrant priests were in several districts the objects of aversion. "For the poor inhabitants of the country places," adds the report, "love or hatred of their country consists at present, not in obedience to law or respect for legitimate authority, but in attending or not attending the Mass of a constitutional priest."

This dispassionate account, given by men sent to La Vendée for the express purpose of noting the condition of affairs prevailing there, is of no little value if a true conception is to be formed of the spirit in which its peasantry entered upon their desperate adventure.

It must also be remembered that the sentiment confining the patriotism of the Vendean to his province was yet further narrowed and limited, and that La Vendée, divided by tradition and character from the rest of France, was also internally subdivided. The parish of the Vendean peasant, his personal surroundings, were all-important in his eyes. "You tell us the enemy is coming," so ran a Vendean proclamation—"that our hearths are menaced. . . . Should he come, it is from our hearths that we will

fight him." Similar as were the objects and aims of the insurgents in Upper and Lower Vendée, the struggle was begun and carried on in each district for the most part independently and often upon different lines. The inland peasant, engaged in tending his farm or in other agricultural pursuits, was no countryman of the rough marshman, and each regarded the other with something akin to positive antipathy, the name Dannion—for damné homme—being given by the dwellers on the Marais to the inhabitant of the Bocage.[1] This absence of sympathy and of the strength accruing from the possession of a common interest and from the sense of brotherhood, was not to be without its influence upon the course of the war, and from its outset the divergence in the methods of prosecuting the fight in the several districts was apparent.

After the presentation of the report of the commissioners in 1791, a general exodus of the nobles was followed by a period of deceptive calm. But in August 1792, almost simultaneously with the decree of deportation pronounced upon refractory priests, a local rising was an earnest of what was to come. Châtillon was seized and the official buildings burnt. At Bressuire, however, the place next attacked by the insurgents, they were confronted by the National Guard, blood was shed, prisoners were taken, and the riot was practically crushed. Roland was at that time Minister of the Interior; a policy of clemency was pursued in the hope of allaying discontent, and the offenders were allowed to go unpunished.

[1] *Histoire de la Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

For six months the hope seemed to be justified. Autumn had passed away, January had come, and with it the tragedy of the King's death, and still La Vendée had not taken up arms. In the first weeks of March, however, came the call for fresh levies, and at once the country was in revolt.

It was at Machecoul, a comparatively small township in Lower Vendée, not far from the seacoast, that the first outbreak of popular indignation occurred, some four-and-twenty hours before the inauguration of the movement in Upper Vendée with which this volume is mainly concerned. Not the least singular feature of the opening phase of the struggle was that, without preconcerted action or intercommunication, the insurrection took shape at various points almost at the same moment, as if the long patience of the people had suddenly and with one accord given way, and confirming the belief that it was the republican recruiting-sergeant who set the match to the gunpowder. If disaffection had already been rife from end to end of the district, the resistance of the peasants to constituted authority had been merely sporadic; its manifestations had been easily suppressed, though not without loss of life, accompanied on the part of the victors by brutalities unlikely to be forgotten by the vanquished. Now that it had become a question of assuming the livery of the Republic and marching in the ranks of her soldiers it was a different matter, and on the fatal Sunday, March 10, the signal was given for a general revolt. The inhabitants of the district surrounding Machecoul poured by thousands into the little town and, easily overpowering the two hundred of the National Guard who were its

sole defenders, inaugurated the royalist movement by a massacre.

The people belonging to the country round Machecoul—nicknamed the Moutons Noirs, by reason of their dark-coloured clothes—no less than their neighbours, the red-shirted marshmen—often accustomed like the Bretons to the danger and excitement of a smuggler's life—were a wild and fierce race. When they rose and took the law into their own hands their violence was unbridled by any moderating influence. Into the details of the opening scenes of their day of vengeance it is not necessary to enter. The chief result of the rising in Machecoul, so far as other parts of La Vendée were concerned, was that it was here that the insurgents claimed and obtained the services of the chevalier Charette de la Contrie as their leader.

Belonging to an old but impoverished Breton family, the man destined to become one of the most noted of the royalist chiefs was living at this time at the small château of Fonte-Close not far from Machecoul. Born at Nantes, he was now twenty-eight, had served in the navy, and had held the rank of lieutenant when he gave up the profession of a sailor. It was rumoured that he had been one of the earlier emigrants, but that, discontented with his treatment at Coblentz, he had returned to Paris and had taken part in the defence of the Tuileries on August 10, 1792. He had afterwards retired to La Vendée and had lived there on the property of his wife, somewhat older than himself, to whom he was said to make an indifferent husband.

Hunting had been his passion from his youth up, and though delicate in health, he passed much of his

time in the forests, sleeping wherever shelter was to be found, and sometimes absent from home for a week together on some expedition of the kind, thus gaining an intimate knowledge of the country which was to be the scene of his exploits.

His character presented a singular combination of contrasting qualities, of love of pleasure, and power of endurance, of enthusiasm and coldness, of piety of so exaggerated a type that he is said to have caused his army to fast on the eve of a battle, and a deplorable laxity of morals. Michelet, with his power of graphic portrayal, has drawn a picture of the man who plays so important a part in the history of the war; and, likening him to the buccaneers and filibusters of earlier days, has described his pride of birth, his love of fighting for fighting's sake, his indifference to hardship, his attraction for women—devoid of any beauty as he was—and the use he made of it; he has told of his freedom of speech, irrespective of the rank and position of the men with whom it was used, and reaching its climax when he wrote to the heir to the throne—in whose cause he had taken up arms—that all was lost through the cowardice of the Duke's brother; or when, again, he told the Abbé Bernier, who asked what prevented him from joining the Grande Armée, that it was the morals of the Abbé himself.

It was probably owing to other reasons that he kept aloof. Jealousy, the desire to hold undivided command, must have had its share in his voluntary isolation, nor would an army led by men such as Cathelineau, Lescure, d'Elbée and La Rochejacquelein, high-minded, devoted, and saintly, have been an atmosphere where he would have felt himself at home.

Such as he was, his soldiers loved him. On one occasion, possessed by the fear that he was about to abandon them and to join the rival army, they were ready to kill him rather than let him go. In the land where he fought, his memory was kept green, and long after he was in his grave the "Chanson de Charette," sung at every village festival, proved him unforgotten.

This was the leader sought by the peasants after their sanguinary triumph at Machecoul. At first he showed no disposition to accede to their demand, dismissing them, when they applied to him, on March 12, with a categorical refusal. He might be a royalist, he was certainly an adventurer; he was also a practical man, accustomed to the strict discipline of a ship; nor was he inclined to fling himself, as the captain of a tumultuous band of ill-armed rioters, against the forces of the French Republic.

Two days later, his house was once more besieged by an insistent crowd; and in the garden of the château an interview took place destined to decide the fortunes of the master of the house. Cold and reluctant, Charette stood before the rebels, whilst they made their clamorous appeal. Eager, vehement, even menacing, they told him it was shame for him, who had served the King, to permit the sacrileges that were being committed and the imprisonment of priests.

It may be that the argument told upon the man with whom they had to do, who had worn the King's livery and been pledged to be his servant. At all events he yielded, though still with the bearing of one forced to take a part against his will:

"Putting brusquely aside the peasants who were

pressing upon him, his head high, his gestures imperious, he imposes silence upon them. . . . He consents to march with them; but only on condition that his orders are obeyed—that he is master of the soldiers as he had been master of his sailors, and that death is to be the punishment of disobedience. Do they desire to have him on these terms?"[1]

With enthusiasm the throng accepted the hard conditions; and the matter once decided, no time was lost. Charette was ready at once to take his place at their head. Mounting his hunting-pony, he started for Machecoul. One ceremony was performed before Fonte-Close was left behind. On a great elm dominating the garden the white flag was hoisted. Passing before it, his sword drawn, the new leader saluted the symbol of royalty and threw in his lot with the rebels. The men who followed him took up his shout of "*Vive le Roi!*"; then the crowd moved on, and Charette's career as royalist general began.

Had the captain of the insurrectionary forces of Lower Vendée been a different man; had his brilliant military gifts been associated with a more generous temper, a more single-minded devotion to his cause; if, instead of acting independently, he had co-operated cordially with the chiefs of the Grande Armée, the history of the war might have been different. But the rebellion he headed served the purpose of dividing the resources of the Republic, and had an important bearing upon the fortunes of those who were raising the flag of revolt in Upper Vendée.

[1] *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, Bittard des Portes.

CHAPTER III

March

The outbreak in Upper Vendée—Cathelineau—Stofflet—Sapinaud—Chollet attacked—And taken.

Whilst the tocsin was sounding its call to arms in every village of Lower Vendée, Upper Vendée had not been backward in raising the royalist standard.

On March 4, Chollet, one of its largest towns, had been crowded with peasants come together for the ostensible purpose of discussing, in accordance with the official directions, the method by which the enforced enlistment was to be carried into effect. The aspect of the people was disquieting, and when the officer commanding the National Guard appealed to a group, in the name of peace and unity, tc disperse, he was knocked down, disarmed, and wounded. Though the perpetrators of the outrage were at once seized and made prisoners, and tranquillity was restored, the incident had not been reassuring, and the authorities thought it necessary to apply to the neighbouring department of Maine-et-Loire for reinforcements.

The event was to prove that they had not overrated the need of means of repressing violence. As the days went by, the prevailing excitement was rapidly spreading, and on Sunday the 10th—the day of the massacre at Machecoul—the small town of Saint-Florent took the lead in resistance to the authorities.

It was on that day that the lots were to be drawn for the conscription. A young peasant named Forêt preached defiance; a gendarme was killed; the crowd were fired upon, and flinging themselves upon the cannon, gained possession of it, scattered the soldiers, burnt the public papers, seized the public money, and after celebrating their success with a bonfire, dispersed to their homes. The revolt in Upper Vendée had been inaugurated.

Before many hours had passed, it had found a leader in the person of an artisan named Cathelineau —a chief of a very different type to the man chosen by the insurgents of Lower Vendée to be their general—who was shortly to occupy the position of commander-in-chief of the Grande Armée.

Cathelineau was thirty-five, a married man with five children, the son of a mason, and himself combining that trade with spinning wool and selling it. He had taken no part in the proceedings at Saint-Florent, listening from his cottage to the firing that announced the opening of the conflict. Wise and clear-sighted, he grasped at once, when news of what had occurred was brought, the consequences of the defiance offered to the Government, and foresaw that vengeance was certain to overtake the culprits. To the group of men who gathered round him—twenty-seven in all—he pointed out the fate awaiting them, not in order to induce them to hold back, but rather to press home the need of going forward. By common consent he was adopted as leader, and from thenceforth to the day of his death his influence reigned supreme.

As he went forth with his little band of followers, the peasants rose wherever he passed by, and from

JACQUES CATHELINEAU.

From a lithograph in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

the first the unpremeditated movement was attended with success. The handful of men led by the Angevin artisan was the nucleus of the army which was to hold the forces of the Republic in check for nine months, fighting battle after battle, and rushing upon death, as a republican writer said, as if to a festival, and which at length, driven forth from La Vendée, was to be annihilated almost within sight of home, leaving behind a memory of pity, of sorrow, and of heroism rarely surpassed.

Meanwhile all went well. First the château of Jallais, then the small town of Chemillé, were seized; guns, powder, and a certain amount of military stores fell into the hands of the insurgents, and a piece of cannon—on which the name of "The Missionary" was bestowed—was carried away by the crowd.

Everywhere the country was in a flame. Yesterday—last week—the peasants, angry, resentful, yet passive, had been at home in their little farms, leading the life they had led from childhood upwards, possibly foreseeing no change in that life. Suddenly, in a moment, all was altered; the population had become a military force, destitute indeed of all that commonly renders such a force formidable, of discipline, of experience, for the most part of weapons save what could be fashioned out of agricultural implements; but making up for their absence by fierce enthusiasm, carelessness of danger, and indifference to death.

The moment of the rising had been decided by circumstances rather than by deliberate choice. Yet it afforded the insurgents a chance of success they would otherwise have lacked. La Vendée was, so far as the Republic was concerned, without means of

immediate defence. A few thousand troops—those judged least capable of meeting the foreign enemy on the frontier—a few battalions of the National Guard, were all that could be depended upon to stem the torrent over-running the country. It is this circumstance, no less than their warlike qualities and capacities, which rendered the early victories of the peasantry possible.

With every hour the numbers of the force led by Cathelineau and his comrades was increasing. Stofflet, gamekeeper to the comte de Colbert, had raised 1,200 men and had joined forces with Cathelineau. Reinforcements were crowding in. In every village the tocsin was sounding the call to arms; everywhere it was obeyed. The authorities in the towns were terrified. Stories were current of patriots—the name given to republicans—robbed and mishandled; of pressure brought to bear upon those who would have adhered to the Government, or at least remained neutral in the coming trial of strength. Messengers dispatched in hot haste by officials to beg for succour had been captured before their errand could be executed; the peasants had got the start of their adversaries and were making the most of it.

The necessity of losing no time in securing more competent leaders was fully recognised by the rebels.

"We must have a chief who understands military manœuvres," they said, conscious of the disorder of their march as they moved forward in groups. With the full concurrence of Cathelineau, destitute of any trace of personal ambition, Stofflet, formerly a soldier, had been provisionally named commander of the united forces, in spite of his own protest that he was nothing more than a *roturier*; but, prepared

as the peasants were to follow any capable leader of their own class, they were eager to obtain the co-operation of experienced officers, and were everywhere endeavouring to enlist the local noblesse on their side. M. Sapinaud de la Verrie, belonging to a family of soldiers, and who had himself been for twenty-five years a member of the Body Guard, was one of the first of these pressed into the service. In despair at the condition of public affairs, he, like others of the local magnates, had withdrawn to his country home, and was there living "en philosophe," when the summons came to active intervention, in the shape of a body of insurgents who arrived at his house to beg him to be their leader.

"You shall be our general," they told him. "You shall march at our head."

Like Charette, he would, if he could, have refused. Aware of the desperate nature of the enterprise, he attempted to dissuade his visitors from entering upon it.

"My friends, it is the earthenware vessel against the iron pot," he warned them mournfully. "What shall we accomplish? A single department against eighty-two! We shall be crushed. I do not speak for my own sake. I have a horror of life since I have witnessed the crimes savage men have perpetrated against our unhappy country, and I would rather die fighting at your head for my God and my King, than be dragged to a prison as they have dragged others like me. Believe me, go home, and do not destroy yourselves to no purpose."

The appeal was vain. How, asked the peasants, could they submit to a government that had deprived them of their priests and imprisoned their King?

"They have deceived us," they repeated. "Why do they send us constitutional curés? These are not the men who helped our fathers on their death-beds, and they shall not bless our children."

Sapinaud yielded. If the peasants were ready to make a sacrifice of their lives it was not for him—a soldier of the King—to hold back, and that same day he took his place as leader of the troop, and marched at the head of an undisciplined and disorderly mass, armed with a few hunting-guns, pitchforks, and clubs, upon Les Herbiers. It may justly have seemed an earnest of future success to the men who followed him that, though defended by two companies of Blues, with four or five pieces of cannon, the Vendeans made themselves masters of it within a couple of hours.

And still the infection of enthusiasm was spreading like wildfire from commune to commune, sweeping all before it, and scaring the middle-class inhabitants of the towns, who found themselves suddenly encircled by a hostile multitude and with small means of defence.

Mortagne, menaced by the insurgents, called out the National Guard, broke down the bridge over the Sèvre, and dispatched a small body—some thirty-seven men—to seek for succour. They did not return; falling into the hands of an insurgent contingent, all but two of them met their death.[1] Mortagne was terrified. It was decided that to attempt the defence of the town would be vain, and that

[1] Such is the story told by M. Boutillier de Saint-André in his *Souvenirs*. Another version of it states that the men, having been made prisoners, had sought to make their escape whilst a conflict was taking place, and had thereupon been shot.

flight—the flight of the men, it would appear, the women being left in their homes—was the best policy. When the royalists took possession of the place they did no further damage to it than to destroy the tree of liberty, hang the white flag from the belfry, and restore the church to its former possessors, threatening nevertheless to sack the town unless the men now in hiding should proceed to La Verrie and deliver up their arms to M. Sapinaud. The condition was complied with, and though, not long after, some of the more prominent patriots of the town were thrown into prison, no blood seems to have been shed, and Mortagne passed peaceably into royalist hands.

At Chollet it was otherwise. The scene of the first disturbances, it was one of the earliest points of attack. Cathelineau, already triumphant at Jallais and Chemillé, was preparing, with Stofflet, to lead their forces against the most important town in the neighbourhood. Priests—in various disguises—marched in the ranks. The Abbé Barbotin, tall, strong, ardent in the cause, and of warlike temperament, had been chosen as army chaplain; a man named Six-Sous, formerly a gunner, of evil reputation but skilful in his craft, was entrusted with the one or two pieces of artillery in the hands of the rebels. All, flushed by success, were confident and sanguine.

Whatever had been the case with the smaller townships seized by the insurgents, Chollet was not taken unawares. The Marquis de Beauveau, a noble who had thrown in his lot with the Republic, commanded the National Guard, and, in spite of a wound received in the course of the riot of March 4, was busily organising the defence of the town. If

its powers of resistance were small, they were to be made the most of, Beauveau, though conscious of his danger, having a natural contempt for the ill-armed multitude with whom he had to deal. Four small pieces of artillery were, however, all that were available for the defence of the town and château, with a small body of dragoons, 300 men armed with guns, and 400 or 500 with pikes. Though it is difficult to arrive at a true estimate of the Vendean numbers, increasing from hour to hour, they seem to have counted from 15,000 to 20,000 men, with three captured cannon. It was an unequal struggle.

The morning of March 14 was an anxious one in Chollet. Towards midday there appeared in its streets a man, barefooted, bareheaded, and carrying a thorn-crowned Crucifix.

"Yield, *mes bons amis*," he cried, as he passed along. "Lay down your arms. Otherwise the town will be given up to fire and blood." He came, so he told those who asked him for an explanation, on God's behalf, to prevent the shedding of blood. More than twenty thousand men were at hand.

Other messengers followed. Two republican prisoners were sent forward, the bearers of a letter from the royalist chiefs, summoning the town officials to surrender, and promising that, in this case, life and property should be safe.

For a moment those in charge of the town hesitated. A retreat towards Nantes might have been attempted; but it was felt, in spite of the royalist pledges, that the town would have been left at the mercy of an undisciplined and angry multitude, and the idea was abandoned. Beauveau, too, scouted the

suggestion, bringing the traditions of old race and blood to serve the cause of his new principles.

"Citizens," he cried indignantly, "one does not fly before the enemy like cowards. True republicans go where duty calls them. They move forward to meet rebels. Let us march."

He was obeyed. The attack of the enemy was not to be awaited in the town; it was determined to advance to meet them, in the hope that the disorderly mass would be dispersed by a charge of regular troops. At a little distance from the town the small body of soldiers were stationed, prepared to receive their assailants, and here the last summons to surrender was brought. As he listened to it, Beauveau turned to his grenadiers.

"Citizens," he shouted, "here is the enemy. Shall we be cowards enough to lay down our arms?"

"*Vive la République!*" was the reply. The fight, no matter how unequal, was to take place. Meanwhile, a little way off, the Vendean troops had fallen on their knees, the priest, Barbotin, standing above them, and pronouncing a general absolution. A few minutes later the battle had begun. As Cathelineau advanced the republicans opened fire; whilst Six-Sous, in charge of the royalist guns, pointed them upon the enemy, proud of his reputation as a marksman.

"I aimed too high," he cried as the ball passed over the heads of the Blues. "Wait; the next will go right."

His boast was justified. At his second shot Beauveau fell, mortally wounded, thirty-six of the national guards at his side were thrown to the ground, and the fight became general—a fight of men struggling

face to face, the peasants using their pitchforks to keep off the foe, throwing themselves upon the gunners and killing them at their posts. Before long the small body of republican dragoons were flying precipitately, carrying with them confusion and panic, and followed, though in more orderly fashion, by the remainder of the troops. Beauveau, borne out of the scene of the conflict by his soldiers, lay where fugitives and pursuers passed him, and reviled the latter as they swept by.

"Ah, how I suffer, how I suffer," he cried. "Cursed brigands, put an end to me. Give me the *coup de grâce*."

Whether the Vendeans scorned to kill a wounded man, or for other reasons, their sole response was to drag him to the edge of the road, and to place him at the foot of a Calvary, where he lay, the words "*Vive la République!*" on his lips till death came to release him.[1]

At that same Calvary a singular scene took place. As the Vendeans passed it in hot pursuit of the enemy, each peasant paused to fall bareheaded on his knees before continuing the chase, thus affording the Blues a chance of reaching the shelter of the town—a chance of which they availed themselves to rally and form when the barriers had been gained, and to take up their position in front of the Château.

In Chollet itself the fight went fiercely on, till, threatened with the town being set on fire, the defenders of the Château surrendered and the Vendean triumph was complete.

Nor does it appear on the whole that the peasants disgraced their victory by acts of violence. It was

[1] *La Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

true that the gunner, Six-Sous—said to be an ex-convict—made a raid upon the building where the prisoners were confined, overpowered the guard, robbed the captives, and led them out to be shot; but he was prevented from carrying out his purpose, and no prisoners seem at this time to have lost their lives. When, having made arrangements for the defence of the town, the Catholic army, as it was now called, took its departure, some of the captives were left in safe keeping; others, roped together in couples, were placed in front of the rebel forces and compelled to march with them, as they moved away to engage in fresh conflicts.

CHAPTER IV

March and April

Royalist successes—Joseph Cathelineau's deposition—Incidents of the struggle—Republican measures—Marcé's defeat—The Easter peace—Scenes at Chollet—Reassembling of the peasants—Sapinaud's forebodings.

To pursue in detail the early course of the war would be tedious, its general character being so uniform that one day comes near to telling another. Broadly speaking, the whole of the rural population in the disaffected districts were pitted against the towns, mostly small, each provided with its republican municipality, each possessing most inadequate means of defence—a few hundred citizens, unused to arms, enrolled in the National Guard, a few pieces of cannon, and sometimes in addition a small body of regular troops, mainly consisting of raw recruits. One after another these townships fell into the hands of the royalists; one after another they expiated their adherence to the new order of things by loss, more or less extensive, of life and property. Sometimes a determined resistance was offered to the onrushing mass of the peasantry, sometimes more prudent counsels prevailed in the face of the numbers by whom the towns were threatened, and, in the hope of averting bloodshed, the defenders laid down their arms.

Of the period immediately succeeding the first outbreak, Joseph Cathelineau, the young brother

of the royalist leader, gave an account, brief and simple, when captured and brought a prisoner, on March 27, before the newly formed republican tribunal. It was about a fortnight since he had joined the army. He had done so by reason of the drawing for military service, and had, he added, truly or falsely, been forced into the step. The boldest of the men had taken the lead and were in command. Some 500 had belonged to the army when he joined it; it now numbered 20,000. The men wore the white cockade; their watchword was "*Vive le Roi, vive la Reine et la Religion!*" They increased their numbers as they went through the country by enlisting all who would go with them and threatening those who refused. Their object in rising was to have a king; it was for the sake, also, of religion, and in order to have priests who had not taken the oath. Priests were in the army, and Mass had been said at various places. Half of the men had weapons, good or bad; the rest nothing but sticks, pitchforks, hatchets, and other implements. Additional information was elicited from the prisoner as to the condition and customs of the army; the sentence of death was then pronounced, and in less than twenty-four hours the lad—he was no more than twenty-one—was shot.

In some cases the victories of the royalists were attended by scenes only too easily explained when the composition of the troops is taken into account. Favourably as the peasants of Upper Vendée compared in this respect with those belonging to the districts of Lower Vendée and bordering upon the coast, they were not guiltless of occasional outbreaks of violence, when the lives of prisoners were not safe. That this was so is no wonder. As the

war proceeded, and even in its beginnings, the Vendeans had much to avenge, and though saints and heroes were in their ranks, the bulk of the combatants were angry men, forced for a time into submission and now enjoying a brief and precarious triumph. Nor, if they were ready to take other men's lives, were they careful of their own. "Would it be believed," writes Savary of the fight at Chollet, "that unhappy, unarmed peasants, their hands clasped, their heads bare, threw themselves upon their knees twenty paces from the Pavilion [defended by the National Guard]? They seemed to desire death and to court it," uncovering their breasts and defying the enemy.

From men who held their own lives so cheap it was vain to expect tenderness with regard to those of their foes. "I love you well, monsieur," a peasant told the captive president of the tribunal of Chollet—Savary himself—"You did all you could for us. I am very sorry to see you here. . . . But I want our good priests, and you do not like them. Go to confession, monsieur, I beg of you; for, *tenez*, I have pity on your soul, and still I shall have to kill you"—a catastrophe which, happily, did not come to pass.

Where a grudge was felt against individuals it was likely to find expression. Thus it is asserted by Savary[1] and allowed to be not improbable by the royalist historian, Deniau,[2] that two of the constitutional priests who, as prisoners, were compelled to march with the royalist troops, were treated with brutality; and it has been seen that young Cathelineau admitted that those of the country people

[1] *Guerres de la Vendée*, Savary. [2] *La Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

who declined to join the insurgents did so at their peril. Again, when Blues had refused a summons to surrender, or were found in hiding or with weapons in their hands, some of them paid the death penalty.

"Give up your arms," shouted the peasants by whom he was surrounded to an officer of the National Guard. "Give up your arms, or you are a dead man."

"I have sworn to bear them for the defence of my country," was the reply, and he fell, struck down by his assailants. Heroism was not confined to one side, nor were republican principles without their martyrs.

Incidents such as these, and others of the kind—outbreaks of cruelty and vengeance—are inseparable from the history of any war, and more especially a war carried on by men to whom fighting is a novelty, and who may have found it difficult to distinguish between what was lawful and inevitable, and deeds forbidden, not only by the moral sense, but by the codes of military honour to which they were strangers. The circumstances taken into account, it cannot be denied that the peasants of Upper Vendée, more particularly in the earlier stages of the war, showed themselves singularly free from the lust of blood.

Meantime, the news of the rebellion, coming at a moment of special anxiety, had caused consternation in Paris; and no time had been lost in taking measures to crush it before it should have had time to develop. The army of reserve destined for the protection of Paris was dispatched to La Vendée; the few troops that could be spared from the armies guarding the frontiers were ordered in haste to the scene of the disturbances. To these forces were

added the battalions named the "Vainqueurs de la Bastille," made up of Parisians without military discipline or experience, and hoping to win laurels in fighting the peasants of the west.

Nantes, which had been threatened, was relieved; at Doué an improvised Council of Defence for the district was formed, and a corps was raised for the protection of Saumur. Volunteer recruits from neighbouring departments responded in numbers to the appeals of the authorities, and were rapidly distributed in battalions about the country—raw levies with even less training or discipline than the peasants to whom they were to be opposed. Here and there the services of some officers of standing and experience were obtained. Quétineau, home on leave from the army in Belgium, was made commander-in-chief of the troops in the department of Deux-Sèvres; and General Ligonnier was nominated provisionally to the command of the forces of Maine-et-Loire. It was not a post he had coveted, and, writing urgent appeals for men and officers, he begged to be relieved of his charge and permitted to return to the Pyrenean army.

And in the midst of the confusion, whilst a determined attack upon the rebels was in preparation, and the few officers with military experience were endeavouring to reduce disorder to order amongst their undisciplined soldiers, the hastily organised local "Commission Civile," supreme for the moment in authority, issued a proclamation to the republican troops which, echoing the purer and nobler spirit of the early phases of the revolution, is in melancholy disaccord with the scenes that were to follow.

"Citizens"—thus it ran—"you are under the

command of the law; you march in the name of the law; you should conduct yourselves in accordance with the law. You are to fight with men whose chief crime is to have listened to the perfidious counsels of those who have deceived them. They are doubtless guilty; they have forced you to take up arms against them. Were they to be victorious, they might perhaps not spare you. But for your part, animated by the happiness of your country, you whose noble ambition should be to know how to conquer and to forgive—would you, imitating the enemy, kill those delivered by the fortunes of war into your hands? Remember that the disarmed and vanquished man is under the protection of the law. . . . Remember that the cause you are defending is that of every nation, and should raise a man to its own level. Remember in conclusion that the law will strike whomsoever shall attempt to evade it."

Words such as these breathe the spirit of the time when the fair new gospel of brotherhood and humanity had not yet been defaced—the spirit epitomised by Michelet in the exclamation "Oh, my enemies, there are no longer any enemies!" But at Paris sterner counsels were in the ascendant, and to the men who now there reigned supreme, mercy to rebels seemed sheer sentimentality, weakness, and folly. Before the end of March the Convention had taken the step of pronouncing sentence of outlawry against all who joined in any rebellious act. Tribunals, composed of five officers each, were to be established, and, upon the evidence of two witnesses, were to judge the cases brought before them within twenty-four hours. It was true that pardon was promised by proclamation to all who would submit

in twenty-four hours, or who should deliver up the leaders and instigators of the revolt. But from this offer, priests, nobles, their agents and servants, foreigners, leaders, murderers, and incendiaries were excluded. No man, under these circumstances, who had borne arms in the Vendean army could feel safe.

The decree had become law on March 19, not a week after the breaking out of the rebellion. Had anything been needed to render those who had taken part in it more desperate in their determination to fight to the death, it was done.

There was enough to cause the Government alarm. On the very day the decree was passed in Paris a serious engagement between General Marcé and the royalists had resulted in a defeat expiated a year later by Marcé on the scaffold. Though the customary cry of treachery was raised, it would seem that he was blameless, the disaster being due to one of those fits of "*terreur panique*" to which the republicans were subject when brought into contact with the fierce enthusiasm of the royalist troops. The usual methods had been employed; and, fired upon from behind the hedges, the inexperienced soldiers under Marcé's orders had become wholly demoralised, had fled precipitately, and in some cases had insisted upon dispersing to their homes.

It was in any case difficult to keep together the raw levies who had obeyed the summons to rise in defence of the Republic. "I have seen it with my eyes," wrote Grille, then a boy, "crowds arriving, the sound of singing, sighs, lamentations, struggles, the whistling of bullets, anxiety, intoxication, terror mingling with heroism." [1] Readily as the neighbour-

[1] *La Vendée en* 1793, Fr. Grille,

ing departments responded to the call to arms, the recruits never contemplated a prolonged term of service, and diplomatic measures were necessary to induce them to quit their own districts. They were also disposed to give a practical application to the new doctrine of equality. "The head of each band," wrote an administrator of the republican army, "aspired to be general, and acted as if independent of the superior officers already filling their posts. Even the soldiers conceived they had a right to sit in judgment upon the conduct of their generals."

Another factor detrimental to the republican chances throughout the war was the distrust felt at Paris of the local commanders. Failure was sufficient to convict a man of treason, and it was hard for generals of birth and blood to escape suspicion.

With the royalists all was going well. The triumphs of those marvellous days—scarcely more than ten or eleven in all—were crowned by the seizure of Chalonnes. As they looked back upon what had been done it is not surprising that the mass of the peasants, forgetting that part at least of their success was due to the enemy having been taken unawares, imagined that their work was done. That the little King was in the hands of his gaolers, that the Republic still replaced the monarchy—facts of all importance to the nobles who had taken up arms in the royalist cause—mattered little to the Vendean peasant, absorbed in the personal and private aspect of the struggle; and he was sanguine enough to believe that he had vindicated his right to refuse to serve in the republican armies, and would be left to lead his own life as before.

This being the case, and his object, as he imagined,

accomplished, he desired, no less than the republican levies, to return to his home; and towards the end of March the army, in spite of the remonstrances of its chiefs, melted away like a snowball. A remnant of young men infected with the love of fighting, some few more obedient than others to their leaders, or the warlike Bretons who had crossed the Loire to join the rebels, alone remained to form the nucleus of a permanent force. All that could be obtained from the rest was a promise that, should danger threaten, they would again take up arms.

If the leaders were well aware that danger was all around, they were powerless against the determination of the peasants, and after dividing the powder and weapons seized during the brief campaign, they repaired to their several posts, arranging for a fresh gathering at Chollet on the Sunday after Easter. Before separating it was necessary to decide upon what was to be done with the prisoners, of whom a large number had been taken. To guard and feed them was practically impossible, and with the exception of some persons more noted and influential than the rest, they were set at liberty on condition of pledging themselves never again to bear arms against the royalists. It was a promise easy to give, and one that some of the men, forced against their will into the service of the Republic, would have gladly kept. But in the teeth of the pressure brought by the recruiting officers of the Government it would not be easy for them to adhere to their pledge.

Meantime Easter was at hand—it fell that year upon March 31—and the approach of the festival had been yet another reason determining the peasants to return to keep it in their homes. To many of

them it must have been a curious interlude of peace in the middle of the war. Joy and thanksgiving were universal throughout the province. Churches that had been closed, or served by priests the peasants refused to recognise, were re-opened. Te Deums were sung; all was gladness.

It was unfortunate that during the days immediately preceding the festival a scene had taken place at Chollet, regarded as the royalist head-quarters, casting a shadow over the town.

It will be recalled that at the time of its capture there had been a moment when the lives of the prisoners had been in danger from the irresponsible brutality of the artilleryman Six-Sous and those under his influence. Certain of the more important royalists belonging to the town had then intervened to save them; but had only achieved their object on condition that three of their own number should carry a summons to surrender to the town of Saumur. When it became known that death had been the result of the mission thus undertaken, indignation was great, and Six-Sous, always ready for acts of violence, arrived at Chollet on Maundy Thursday—accompanied by the army chaplain, Barbotin—prepared to take a vengeance after his own heart.

Amongst the captives at Chollet was a young man named Balard, specially obnoxious to those of opposite opinions by reason of his ardent republicanism. He had been foremost in proceedings against priests and nobles, had been accused of perpetrating atrocities at the time of the riots in the previous August, and had recently taken an active part in the defence of the town. Sentence of death had been passed upon him; but, at the instance of the royalist com-

mittee established in the town, it had not been carried into effect.

Six-Sous—in ostensible retaliation for the murder of the three envoys—now took the execution of this sentence upon himself. The republicans must be taught that royalist blood was not to be shed with impunity; and the gunner shot the victim with his own hands, Barbotin being accessory to the crime. The disgraceful scene was followed on the next day, Good Friday, in spite of the protests of the inhabitants, by the marriage of the chief actor in it, the ceremony being performed by the army chaplain. When d'Elbée, by this time one of those chief in command of the royalist forces, hurried to the town on the Saturday, he quickly took order. Though too late to prevent what had occurred, he set most of the prisoners at liberty, on condition that they reported themselves daily, and made sure that those retained in confinement had no reason to complain of their treatment.

Notwithstanding his intervention, whilst men such as Six-Sous were abroad, the captives must have felt their ultimate fate precarious, and—to finish their story—some two or three weeks later any fears they may have entertained seemed likely to be justified. It is Savary, ex-president of the local republican tribunal, who tells how news of royalist reverses reached the town, followed by the arrival of some hundreds of armed Bretons on their way to join the Vendean troops; and how the strangers issued orders that the prisoners should be brought out, as they believed, to be put to death. Carefully counted, four of their number were found to be missing, and a search was instituted, their companions awaiting

their fate in the courtyard below. All that was possible was done by the responsible royalist committee to protect the captives, the courtyard being surrounded by Vendeans on their knees beseeching God to prevent the impending massacre. It may be that the peril had been exaggerated. In any case the fierce Breton contingent was forced to proceed on its way before the defaulters had been discovered; and during a panic that night the royalist guards deserted their posts, and the prisoners were at liberty to go whither they pleased.

To return to the course of events. When, on April 7, the tocsin called the peasants again to arms, after a fortnight's rest, they responded in multitudes to the summons. What had been no more than a partial rising, had become general. Few parishes remained that had not joined in the movement; and though the authorities were attempting to enforce the military ballot, the determination of the people never to abandon their homes for distant service was so unshaken that a village such as Beaulieu, though warned of the consequences should it continue recalcitrant, preferred to be burned to the ground rather than yield.

In spite of occasional reverses, fortune, particularly in Upper Vendée, was still declaring itself on the side of the rebels. The whole countryside, with the exception of part of the district of Bressuire, was in their hands, and sanguine men—especially amongst the young and enthusiastic—may have believed that it might be possible, if not to restore the monarchy, to make terms with the authorities, to safeguard the district from conscription, and to secure the interests of religion.

That these two objects were paramount is shown by a manifesto issued by the insurgents in reply to a proclamation addressed to them by the local officials and filled with mingled promises and threats.

"Remove from us the scourge of the militia," ran the Vendean reply, "and leave the country the labour it needs. . . . Restore our former pastors to our ardent desires. . . . Restore with them the free exercise of the religion of our fathers, for the maintenance of which we would shed the last drop of our blood. These are our principal demands. We add to them our desire for the re-establishment of the monarchy, unable to live under a republican government only suggesting to our minds ideas of division, disturbance, and war."

The numbers of the tumultuous multitude composing the Catholic army were by this time immense. It was a multitude continuing ever to rise and fall, collecting in its thousands when an enterprise was to be undertaken, and melting away in a day when the stroke had been dealt—a crowd that lived how it could, and obeyed who it would, making up in fidelity and courage what it lacked in other respects. To maintain this body in any permanent shape would have been manifestly impossible; and as the arrangements of the leaders took shape a kernel of the better armed men, supplemented by recruits drawn to La Vendée from other parts of the kingdom or from abroad, was kept together and placed in detachments at the more important stations; to be reinforced at need by the masses who, rising at the sound of the tocsin, enlisted for a definite number of days, and dispersed to their homes so soon as the specified period was at an end.

The difficulty of directing and controlling an army thus formed is self-evident; and notwithstanding the military gifts developed with such astonishing rapidity by the Vendean peasant, the successes attending the early phases of the war are amazing.

In spite of these successes one man was under no illusion as to the ultimate results to be anticipated from the struggle, and the attitude maintained by M. de Sapinaud probably represents that of many of his more thoughtful comrades. Visiting his sister-in-law a few days after the capture of Chollet, he showed that he was looking forward, with unbroken melancholy, to the end he had foreseen when he threw in his lot with the rebels—to his own death and that of many others. In vain Madame de Sapinaud strove to combat his forebodings.

"Do not imagine," he answered, "that I tremble at the thought of death. I offered the sacrifice of my life the day I took up arms; I have flung myself into the fight; it is done. I will postpone the fatal moment as long as it is possible; but I am sure that I shall shortly perish. My only regret is not to be of service, before I die, to the brave peasants who have followed me."

He had ridden over to Mortagne, where Madame de Sapinaud was living, and it was there that their farewell took place—a farewell that one at least of the two took to be final. As his sister-in-law watched him mount his horse amidst shouts of "*Vive le Roi!*" she caught the infection of his sadness, nor was it many months before his presentiment of disaster was fulfilled.

CHAPTER V

April

The royalist armies—Their leaders—Bonchamps—d'Elbée—Berruyer's defeat—His description of the Vendean peasants—His recall—Royalist reverses—Appearance of La Rochejacquelein upon the scene.

At this early stage of the war the royalist forces had mostly remained attached to their several leaders—leaders, so far as Upper Vendée was concerned, ready to co-operate cordially with one another, but retaining their separate commands, and acting independently. The army of the Centre, as it was called, occupied the territory between the district where Charette was in arms and that of the Upper Vendean chiefs, and had gathered round Royrand, Sapinaud de la Verrie, and others. Cathelineau and Stofflet, heading the revolt in Anjou, were shortly joined by d'Elbée and Bonchamps; whilst, a little later on, in Poitou, the royalists were to find leaders in M. de Lescure, his cousin, Henri de La Rochejacquelein, his father-in-law, the marquis de Donnissan, and other men connected with him by ties of blood or friendship.

These bodies of insurgents, afterwards to be united under the name of the Grande Armée, worked in concert from the first, unhampered by the spirit of rivalry, or by that tendency to exalt one man or one body of troops at the expense of another which is unfortunately noticeable in some of the memoirs and

histories dealing with these times, and printed after the death of the chief actors in the scenes they describe.[1] If, as was perhaps inevitable, jealousy and emulation crept in at a later date, when most of the men who had been the first to inaugurate the struggle were gone, little or none of it was apparent in these early days. Nor was difference of rank and position suffered to be any bar to true comradeship.

"It is for the nobles to lead us," said Cathelineau; "we are no less brave than they, but they understand better the art of war"; and the renunciation of any claim to pre-eminence on the part of the man who had headed the rebellion in Anjou expressed the general feeling amongst the peasants. It must be repeated that nothing in the Vendean war is more curious than the spirit of freedom and equality prevailing in an army ostensibly attempting to restore the old order of things and pledged to the cause of reaction. The nobles were loved and trusted; and their superiority in point of position was accepted as a matter of course. The peasants nevertheless did not hesitate to speak plainly when they considered them to blame.

"What you have done was not a thing a noble should do," they would say, using his very rank as a reproach to a man who had shown weakness; or again: "You were a little cowardly at that attack," they told one of their generals.[2] Their frankness was not resented, and the good understanding between all grades in the service was a chief element of its strength. On the one side no less than on the other, rank, race, blood, were ignored. All were alike soldiers

[1] Especially those of Madame de La Rochejacquelein.

[2] *La Vendée Militaire*, Joly-Crétineau.

of the King, and engaged in the vindication of the honour of God.

The nobles, for their part, though scarcely in a single instance active promoters of the war, were not slow to respond to the demands made upon them. They had returned to La Vendée—some from the capital, others from abroad—melancholy and disillusioned men, intending to seek in their homes a refuge from public disaster. But if their poorer neighbours had determined upon resistance, it was not for them to refuse to take their natural place at their head, and before the end of March many had thrown in their lot with the insurgents with a quiet devotion the more heroic because it is plain that the venture was in their eyes hopeless.

At this time d'Elbée and Bonchamps held the chief command amongst the rebel troops in Upper Vendée, assisted and counselled by Cathelineau and Stofflet.

The two men presented a singular contrast. Both had been soldiers, both were men of honour, of high character; both had lately married, and had withdrawn from public affairs and retired to their country homes in La Vendée. There the likeness ended. Bonchamps, considered by many the ablest of the royalist generals, was frank, kindly, fond of pleasure; a reckless spendthrift, living in earlier days on a scale corresponding to double his actual income. Many-sided and keen in his interests, he would devote himself by turns to the study of mathematics, drawing, music, and literature, or would spend hours arranging the movements of regiments of tin soldiers. Addicted to gambling, he never showed himself affected by his losses. His personal attraction was great, nor had

any man in his regiment been more popular. Affectionate and debonair, he loved life, and had cherished the hope, in spite of the course of public events and the suspicion attaching to a man of his birth and antecedents, of remaining undisturbed in his retreat. Though he had been once summoned to appear before the departmental tribunal and had on another occasion narrowly escaped being thrown into prison, he was living quietly with his wife and his two little children when the call to arms reached him. Like others of his comrades, he hesitated before acceding to the clamorous demands of the peasants that he would take his place at their head. Like others he ended by yielding to their appeal.

"Are you irrevocably determined to sacrifice everything to the sacred cause you desire to defend?" he asked the deputation who visited him. "Do you pledge yourselves never to abandon it?"

The answer being eagerly made in the affirmative he further caused his visitors to swear fidelity to religion, to the little captive King, to the monarchy, and to the country. Nor did he omit to warn them against the cruelty so often an accompaniment of internecine warfare. After which he set out for Saint-Florent, to begin his career as a royalist leader. To his wife, as he took leave of her, he addressed words of melancholy foreboding. Let her arm herself with courage—she would need it. Robbery, proscription, possibly death, would be the portion of the royalists. Earthly glory would not fall to their share; civil war did not provide it. And so husband and wife parted, the woman's lot—that of watching, anxiety, and fear—being perhaps the harder of the two.[1]

[1] *Mémoires*, Madame de Bonchamps.

D'Elbée, Bonchamps' loyal brother-in-arms, was cast in a different mould. "General la Providence," as he was sometimes called in affectionate raillery, owing to his constant references to the watchfulness and care of a higher power, was of Scottish origin, his family having come to France in the fifteenth century, and many of its members having served in the Scottish Guard. Born in Dresden, he had learnt the art of war under the great captain, Maurice de Saxe, had been infected for a time by the revolutionary spirit of the age, and, when the fall of the Bastille had seemed to herald a new and brighter epoch for France, had joined in presenting an address offering help and money to the deputies to be sent from Angers to the Constituent Assembly. Loyalty to the crown in its abasement had, however, triumphed over the principles of progress, and in 1791 he was fighting amongst the emigrants under General de la Saulais. The lightness and frivolity of the atmosphere prevailing on the frontier did not prove to his taste. Of a stern and sombre nature and of singularly pure life, finding that promotion was only to be bought through a woman, he left the service, returned, with the Prince de Condé's permission, to France, and there became implicated in the plot set on foot by La Rouarie. When the death of the Breton leader and that of the King terminated the conspiracy, he retired to La Vendée, and, having made a love marriage, was living quietly at his home of La Gobrinière when to him as to others came the summons to fight.

On March 13 he was visited by a body of peasants from Saint-Martin-de-Beaupréau, numbering some 2,000 men, with the demand that he would take

command of them. Again a scene similar to what had passed in connection with Charette, Sapinaud, and Bonchamps took place. D'Elbée, too, would have dissuaded the rebels from carrying their enterprise into effect. The Revolution, he told them, was an accomplished fact; one they were too weak to contend against. Let them think well before engaging in a fruitless struggle. For his own part, however, should they decide upon it he would not refuse to be their leader. "Compelled by my conscience to die for God and the King, I am ready to sacrifice my life to such a cause; but I will command only soldiers worthy of becoming martyrs." Let them go home and reconsider the matter. "If God gives you courage to die, come back to-morrow; and I will march with you."

On the morrow they returned, their determination unshaken; and taking leave of his wife and the newborn son he was never to see again, d'Elbée left his home.

Such were Bonchamps and d'Elbée—neither of them destined to outlive the year.

The month of March—the month that had decided so many destinies and sealed the fate of thousands of men and women—had closed. Whither events were tending it was impossible to predict. General Berruyer had been appointed to the chief command on the republican side, and on April 11 a fight took place near Chemillé between his troops and the royalists. On this occasion a solitary instance of treachery on the part of a Vendean soldier is recorded; when Six-Sous—the gunner conspicuous by his brutality at Chollet—attempted to deliver his

comrades into the hands of the enemy. Suspicions had been already aroused by his conduct; he had been watched, and it was ascertained that he had accepted bribes from the Blues. On the night preceding the engagement with Berruyer's forces he was found to have unloaded the guns under his charge and to have filled them with sand and earth. His guilt was proved, and the traitor was shot, meeting his death in cowardly fashion. His treason may have conduced to the victory of the royalists by leading the enemy to conclude that their cannon had been rendered useless.[1]

However this may have been, the attack made on the following day was wholly successful, Berruyer, ill-supported by his troops, being forced, in spite of his personal valour, to retreat.

"I had the grief," he wrote to the Minister of War, "of seeing most of the volunteers flying in cowardly fashion. It is hard for an old soldier to command cowards."

Though laying his plans for fresh operations, he added that it was impossible to count upon these volunteers, both ill-armed and ignorant, for the most part, of the very meaning of a weapon.

With the exception of the few regular soldiers who could be spared from the frontier on the republican side, and of the foreign recruits who rallied by degrees to the royalist standard, the opposed forces were in fact almost equally destitute of military knowledge and experience. But the Vendeans brought with them a natural aptitude for soldiership, together

[1] The incident is related somewhat differently by the Abbé Deniau, who places Six-Sous' treachery and execution about a fortnight earlier.

with a fire and enthusiasm and an indomitable courage well calculated to give them an advantage over their antagonists. It is evident, reading General Turreau's account of the war, that the fierce onslaughts, the blind, reckless passion, of the rebel masses who flung themselves upon him, filled him with something like consternation. He is the expert fencer, disconcerted and put at a disadvantage by the untaught fury of an assailant who fears nothing, and to whom death, in comparison with defeat, is a matter of indifference. With Turreau's account, Berruyer's—sent to the Convention—is in full accordance. "Fanaticism," he wrote, "is at its height in this district. The priests have excited the spirits of all men, so that the rebels fight with desperation. The more violent their death the more merit they conceive that they have acquired. Nevertheless, had I seasoned troops I should succeed in reducing them to submission."

Seasoned troops were not to be had at this stage in the war. The men Berruyer commanded were mostly clamouring to be sent home, were many of them lukewarm or indifferent as to the quarrel between royalist and republican, and were in no wise fitted to contend with peasants combining with their courage a spirit he described as most extraordinary and *exalté*, who were ready to forsake wives, children, possessions, all that was dearest to them on earth, in order to follow the priests who, the Crucifix in their hands, gave them their blessing and promised them Heaven. "I am forced," added the General, "to say that my volunteers are far from displaying a similar energy."

Berruyer was not destined to witness the ultimate

success of the republican forces. In Paris the tidings of defeat were received with mingled dismay and indignation. There failure was not so much a misfortune as a crime, and Berruyer, like others, was made to feel it. Denounced in the Convention as guilty of delay and of a refusal to communicate with the administrative authorities in the west, he was deprived of his command, was recalled by the Committee of Public Safety, and his campaign in La Vendée was ended.

Yet at this very time the tide seemed to be turning against the royalist army. Stofflet had been defeated at Coron, Bonchamps near Saint-Florent; the spirits of the republicans were rising, and when the Vendean chiefs assembled in council at Tiffauges, it was to confess that ruin threatened them. Commanding an army of 30,000 men, without discipline or experience, destitute of munitions of war, and surrounded by a semi-circle of republican troops, their situation was critical in the extreme. Bonchamps was of opinion that the best chance of success would lie in crossing the Loire and making an appeal to Brittany.

It was when things were in this condition that a fresh factor was introduced into the war, and that Henri de La Rochejacquelein made his dramatic entry upon the scene.

CHAPTER VI

April

The Château of Clisson—Its host and his guests—La Rochejacquelein leaves it to join the royalists—His success—Republican disorganisation—Vendean triumphs—Treatment of prisoners—The Lescures in confinement—Panic amongst the Blues.

To La Rochejacquelein the call to arms had come when he was at the château of Clisson,[1] under the roof of his friend and kinsman, the marquis de Lescure. It seems strange that the two, who were to belong to the group of the most noted royalist leaders, had remained until nearly the middle of April without taking any part in what was going forward. But so little facility of intercommunication existed in the district that, the neighbourhood having remained comparatively undisturbed, little was known at the château of the royalist movement until the insurrection had almost reached its doors.

Lescure had retired to his estate, near Bressuire, after the sack of the Tuileries, holding himself prepared to return at once to the capital should an opportunity of doing the King service offer. A young man of twenty-seven, of blameless character and deeply religious, he had so wholly refrained from any advertisement of his principles that doubts as to their nature appear to have been felt by his republican neighbours. These doubts were soon to be dispelled.

[1] Not to be confounded with the town of Clisson.

With Lescure was his young wife, whose *Mémoires*, published when she had become, on her second marriage, the marquise de La Rochejacquelein,[1] though not free from prejudice and partisanship, throw considerable light on the history of the following months, and her six-months-old baby.

Drawn together by common interests and common regrets, a group of royalist men and women had gathered at the château, and were thence looking mournfully on at the wreck of all they loved and honoured. Amongst them were the chevalier Desessarts, whose name was afterwards well known, and Bernard de Marigny, destined to become one of the most eminent of the Vendean leaders. A sailor and a chevalier of Saint-Louis, he was handsome, gay, generous, gallant, and full of enthusiasm ; but though commonly kindly towards man and beast, he united with his good qualities a violence of temper causing him to be guilty of cruelty to enemies and even prisoners, offering a singular contrast to Lescure, in whom it has been said that a Blue, once disarmed, was sure of finding a brother and a defender.[2]

How complete was to be the triumph of their enemies few of the inmates of the château can have divined, any more than how small was the number of that little band of friends destined to survive that melancholy year.

[1] She married Louis de La Rochejacquelein, brother of the Vendean leader.

[2] It was stated by Monsignor Pie, Bishop of Orleans, in a funeral oration upon his wife, that Lescure had never put a man to death. The assertion is difficult to believe ; nor, if true, does there seem much distinction to be drawn between causing a man's death and killing him.

MARIE LOUISE, MARQUISE DE LA ROCHEJACQUELEIN.
From a print in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

If a war was regarded by them as inevitable, no step had been taken at the château to precipitate it; and the first authentic tidings of the outbreak were brought by a detachment of gendarmes who came to demand, though in no hostile spirit, what horses, arms, and ammunition the marquis could supply.

Lescure received his visitors with a laugh. They seemed, he said, to take his house for a fortress; and, their errand fulfilled, the men took their departure, the leader informing Lescure that personally he was a royalist and that a counter-revolution was at hand.

As accounts reached the château of the rebels' successes, a council was held there as to the course to be pursued. The first to speak was Henri de La Rochejacquelein, a tall, handsome, fair-haired lad of twenty-one, "the personification," as he has been called, "of radiant and intrepid youth." He used no uncertain language. He would rather die, he said, than take up arms against the peasants. So also said M. de Lescure, in expectation, as commandant of his parish, of being called upon to march with his servants and dependents in the republican ranks.

Then a woman spoke. It was Madame de Donnissan, Madame de Lescure's mother, who, with her husband, had joined her daughter at Clisson.

"You are all of the same opinion," she said; "you will die rather than live by dishonour. *Eh bien*, we must die."

Preparations were made for any emergency. The baby was sent to the village, as being a safer refuge than the château; the women were placed in concealment in a farm. Madame de Lescure was given lessons in riding, in case horsemanship should prove, as indeed it did, to be necessary. Yet a week passed

before a second body of gendarmes arrived from Bressuire with fresh demands, and especially instructed to seize the horse of Henri de La Rochejacquelein. The young man, so Lescure was informed, was an object of greater suspicion than himself.

"I know not why he should be," was his host's reply. "He is my friend and cousin, and our opinions are identical."

It soon became apparent that some decided step would be required. Arrests were taking place all round. On March 19 the decree had been passed condemning to death priests, nobles, their agents and dependants, and all who had held government posts, the mere fact of their presence in the rebel provinces being considered to prove their guilt. Moreover orders had been issued for drawing for the militia, and Henri de La Rochejacquelein would shortly be compelled to do so. He was thus left no choice. The only alternatives open to him would be to join the insurgents or to assist in their repression, and he could not hesitate in the course to be pursued, preparing at once to set forth to throw in his lot with them.

Lescure would gladly have done the same, but every one agreed in entreating him to do nothing in haste and to await events. He was not, like his cousin, called upon to fight on the side of the Republic. Let La Rochejacquelein go first and ascertain what chances the royalists had. Were he to find that anything could be done, it would then be time for Lescure to declare himself. To accompany Henri now would be madness and would bring down ruin on the little group of loyalists to whom he had given hospitality.

Lescure yielded. When, however, the same argu-

ments were brought to bear upon La Rochejacquelein and he was urged not to endanger the château and its inhabitants by his conduct, his host refused to endorse the general opinion. Honour had dictated his cousin's determination. He himself was suffering enough in consenting to remain at home; he would, at all events, interpose no obstacles in La Rochejacquelein's way.

Thus it came to pass that Monsieur Henri, as the peasants called him in affectionate familiarity, set out to seek adventure. It was at a critical moment that he was to throw himself into the fight. The royalist army was surrounded by enemies, the powder almost gone, the soldiers were dispersing. But as he passed through the districts where his property lay and his name was known, the peasants everywhere rallied round him, drawing fresh courage from his presence amongst them. Nor was he backward in accepting the leadership they were eager to offer him.

"*Mes amis*," he said, when some, more prudent than the rest, would have demurred at his youth, "were my father here, you would trust him. I am no more than a child; but by my courage I will show myself worthy of commanding you. Follow me if I go forward; kill me, if I should fly. Avenge me, if I should fall."

"*C'était parler en héros*," wrote Napoleon laconically, as he recorded the incident in his *Mémoires*. The words contained no vain boast. In the short span of life that was all that remained to him, La Rochejacquelein was to show himself worthy to the full of the confidence of the men who had taken him upon trust.

There was no time to be lost. Hurrying to Les

Aubiers at the head of the ill-armed crowd who followed him, he attacked a body of Blues, under the command of General Quétineau, drove them back, seized their munitions of war, including two cannon; and without allowing his men an hour's rest carried them on to reinforce the main body of the troops at Tiffauges.

It was one of the turning-points in the early fortunes of the Grande Armée; once more it entered upon a career of victory. With the recall of Berruyer the disorganisation of the republican forces had become, for the moment, complete. Biron, by whom he was to be replaced as commander-in-chief, was with the Italian army and unable to take up his new duties till the end of May. In the meantime it was no wonder that his subordinates found it impossible, with the means at their disposal, to check the spread of the rebellion. Men who could be relied upon to fight were scarce; military apparatus was lacking; the generals were in despair. Menou from Angers, Ligonnier from Doué, sent the same urgent appeals to Paris, the same warnings of disaster, the same confession of inability to make head under present circumstances against the insurgents. Paris, for its part, would have been ready enough to respond to their appeals; but it was difficult to spare more troops, and the raw levies that might be raised could not be supplied with either courage or experience.

In default of means of compelling obedience, a temporary resort was made to gentler methods; and the capital punishment inflicted by the decree of March 19 on all rebels was restricted by proclamation to leaders and instigators of the revolt; hopes of pardon and favour being held out to those

who had merely been misled. The policy of conciliation was not borne out by deeds. The Vainqueurs de la Bastille, brave and unscrupulous, had been carrying on the war after their own fashion, leaving desolation and a track of fire wherever they passed, in spite of the efforts made by General Berruyer before his recall to restrain his disorderly reinforcements. The knowledge that their homes were in flames could not fail to rouse the passions of the peasants, and when it became known that Bonchamps' château had shared the common destruction, his troops begged to be permitted to attack the incendiaries. He was firm in his refusal.

"I thank you for the proofs of your affection you give me every day," was their general's reply, "but not a drop of the blood of my King's soldiers must be shed in defence of my property." "We shall always have enough," he added in answer to the representations of a friend, as to the ruin he was incurring, "if I have the happiness to see my King once more upon the throne. Otherwise we shall need nothing." [1]

Vengeance was not long in overtaking the Vainqueurs. On April 24 they met the royalists in battle and suffered defeat, dying gallantly at their posts.

The difficulty with regard to the disposal of prisoners was increasingly felt. Many were perforce released, others were sent to Mortagne. Situated on a hill, the town dominated the surrounding country, and its ancient ramparts were a means of defence in case of attack. Here, too, munitions of war and captured cannon were stored, women throwing themselves on their knees before the guns and kissing them, with cries of "*Vive le Roi!*"

[1] *Mémoires*, Madame de Bonchamps.

Although prisoners might be in danger—as at Chollet, so also at Mortagne[1]—from ebullitions of sanguinary excitement, their lives were at this time, save in special cases, held sacred by the royalist leaders. The methods of warfare were to suffer alteration under stress of circumstances. To keep an unlimited number of captives was manifestly impossible; to release them was to supply the enemy with reinforcements; but whatever may have been the course pursued at a later date, none now confined in Mortagne had reason to complain of their treatment, a letter brought by two of their number, charged with a proposal for an exchange of prisoners, being conclusive on this point.

"With true pleasure," the captives wrote, "we make public the kindly and humane treatment we have received, and are daily receiving from the generals and commanders of the Catholic army. Our wounded and sick are as well treated as if they were in a hospital. We are persuaded that you are dealing with your prisoners in like manner."

Nothing came of the negotiations, and the envoys honourably returned to their place of captivity.[2]

Meantime the group of royalists left by Henri de La Rochejacquelein at the château of Clisson had found in no long time that safety was not to be looked for there. On the Sunday fixed for the military ballot, twenty gendarmes arrived, armed with a comprehensive order not only for the arrest of Lescure and his wife, but of all other persons suspected of royalist principles. Though no positive charges could be lodged against the master of the house, resistance

[1] *Mémoires*, Boutillier de Saint-André.

[2] *Histoire de les Guerres de la Vendée*, Savary.

would have been vain, and the party, including M. and Madame de Donnissan, were removed to the neighbouring town of Bressuire and placed in confinement.

To the man afterwards to take his place as one of the chiefs of the Grande Armée, his enforced inactivity must have been a bitter thing, the rather that he was partly responsible for it. Had he gone, as he had desired to go, with La Rochejacquelein, he would have been sharing in the dangers and the triumphs of the royalist troops. The captivity of the little group brought from Clisson lasted until the evacuation of Bressuire, early in May—some three weeks after Henri had quitted the château. Throughout those weeks Lescure remained continually chafing at his absence from the scene of action.

"I shall come and deliver you if you are arrested," La Rochejacquelein had said as the cousins bade one another farewell. To the fulfilment of that promise the captives eagerly looked forward, certain that it would not be forgotten, as reports of the varying fortunes of the war, of growing royalist enthusiasm, reached them.

The anxiety with which they watched the course of events may be imagined. Upon the success or failure of the royalist arms depended the fate of the country and to a certain extent their own. It was true that party feeling at Bressuire, in this early stage of the struggle, ran less high than elsewhere. The Lescures were popular in the neighbourhood and little personal animosity was displayed towards them. A friendly member of the republican municipality obtained permission to keep them, under guard, in his own house, and his advice, to the effect

that they should avoid showing themselves at the windows and keep as much as possible out of sight, may have been the means of saving their lives, in danger rather from irresponsible violence than from any other cause. General Quétineau, in command of the Bressuire troops, was a just and honourable man, but it was a time when it was difficult to maintain discipline, and the presence of strangers in the town was a serious peril. Thus a reinforcement of some 400 Marseillais, having arrived there, insisted, in defiance of his orders, on putting eleven prisoners to death; and in spite of the efforts of the Mayor to save them, the men were cut down, kneeling, with the words "*Vive le Roi!*" upon their lips.

Though scenes such as these were not reassuring, no one desired that the Lescure party should meet a like fate, their kindly gaoler doing all that was in his power to shield them; and even a young republican commissioner from whom they received a domiciliary visit merely observed that the war would shortly be at an end—that the woods were to be razed to the ground, the inhabitants decimated, and the remainder deported to an inland province.

The confident forecast was premature. Though news reached the prisoners fitfully, it was clear that the rebels were gaining ground. The royalist army had recovered spirit and hope; and during the weeks following upon La Rochejacquelein's victory at Les Aubiers, success after success was achieved, each tending to provide the troops with essentials for carrying on the war, in the shape of arms, guns, and ammunition. Towns which had once again fallen into republican hands were reoccupied; everywhere the Grande Armée was victorious. The

republican general, Ligonnier, was beaten, another body of troops, commanded by Gauvilliers, was driven across the Loire. Those who had hesitated to throw in their lot with the insurgents, including even a certain number of the inhabitants of the towns, now made common cause with them. By the end of April almost the whole of the Bocage was in the power of the royalists, and on May 1, it became known in Bressuire that the Vendean forces were within three leagues of the town, the news of their approach causing something like an actual panic amongst the republican troops. So great was the terror they inspired that Quétineau could scarcely prevail upon his cavalry to reconnoitre, and when they obeyed it was to take precipitate flight at the sight of eight oxen, bringing back the report that a column of the enemy was advancing.

With the garrison in this condition, even though it numbered 5,000 men, it would not have been easy to defend a town ill-adapted to resist an attack. Quétineau accordingly abandoned the idea of attempting it, deciding early next morning to evacuate the place and to retreat to Thouars. The move was so hurried and the haste of the soldiers to depart so great that most of the ammunition, in spite of the General's attempt to save it, was left behind. More important still was the fact that Lescure was likewise abandoned. To the surprise of the royalist captives they appeared to have been forgotten, whilst townsmen and soldiers vied with each other in flying from a place soon to be occupied by the enemy. By midday the town was almost empty; and Lescure and his wife were quietly walking through the green spring country lanes towards their home. They were free.

CHAPTER VII

May

Lescure joins the fight—Young soldiers—The victory at Thouars—Release of Quétineau—The sham Bishop of Agra—Capture of La Châtaignerie—Defeat at Fontenay—Republican hopes—Second battle and victory of Fontenay.

Although much uncertainty was still felt in Bressuire as to M. de Lescure's politics and his château was crowded with fugitive patriots seeking protection from the royalists, there can have been little doubt amongst those who knew him as to the use he would make of his recovered freedom.

Determined to lose no time in compensating himself for the inactivity he had deplored, he sent at once to the neighbouring parishes—forty in all—to direct the inhabitants to resort to a given rendezvous, where leaders would meet them. It was reported, as it proved falsely, that the Catholic army had abandoned the idea of occupying Bressuire, and Lescure hoped, with the troops he expected to raise, to make himself master of the town without delay.

It was vain for those opposed to his project—his mother-in-law in particular—to represent that he was laying his plans without due consideration, and in ignorance of the whereabouts of either of the contending armies. Having once yielded to the entreaties of his family and refrained from accompanying Henri de La Rochejacquelein, he was not

inclined to repeat the concession, and was eager to join personally in the struggle.

His meeting with Henri was to take place earlier than he had anticipated. It soon became known that the rebels had entered Bressuire; Lescure rode into the town to meet and welcome them, and on his return he was accompanied by La Rochejacquelein himself, happy and triumphant. He had redeemed his pledge and had come to deliver his friends.

All was rejoicing at the château. Its master and mistress were young and little disposed to anticipate disaster. A feature of the struggle now beginning was indeed the preponderance of youth. A middle-aged man, such as d'Elbée, was old in comparison with most of the chiefs. Henri de La Rochejacquelein was to be generalissimo of the Grande Armée before he was twenty-two, and again and again mere boys are found winning their laurels. La Rochejacquelein had brought with him to Clisson a comrade of seventeen whom he introduced as M. Forestier, "an officer in the Vendean cavalry, very brave and greatly esteemed by officers and soldiers alike." The chevalier de Beauvolliers, a year older, and destined to become Lescure's close friend and aide de camp, had been a forced recruit in the republican army, and, escaping from Bressuire, had galloped, with tidings of its evacuation, to join the insurgents, eager to prove his good faith, on which his uniform had cast doubt, by burning the tree of liberty set up in the market-place. The little chevalier de Mondyon, a handsome bright lad of fourteen, having run away from his school in Paris, took part in the fighting as if he had been a grown man. Another recruit, a year younger, in spite of prohibitions, threw himself

into the fight, had a horse killed under him, and having been accorded a post where it was imagined that he would be out of danger, promptly abandoned it, contrived to obtain another horse, and rejoined the army in triumph. Few of these boys were to see the close of the short war.

Bressuire had undergone a singular transformation since the departure of the Blues. As Madame de Lescure drove into the town, on her way, with her mother and other women, to a place where they were likely to find more safety than at Clisson, she was greeted with cries of "*Vive le Roi!*"; fifty men, absorbed in their prayers, were kneeling before a Crucifix as she passed; the streets were crowded and gay, the tree of liberty affording material for a bonfire in the market-place; bells were ringing, and "Marie-Jeanne," a twelve-pounder gun recaptured from the enemy, for which the peasants entertained a special and superstitious affection, was decked with flowers and ribands in honour of the occasion.

There was no time, however, to spare for idle rejoicing. The enterprise now contemplated was the most important hitherto attempted by the Catholic army. This was the siege of Thouars, whither Quétineau had withdrawn. It was a town provided with fortifications, and though very insufficiently garrisoned, was one of the most defensible places of Upper Vendée. But the royalists, after their late successes, were in no mood to flinch from difficulties, and it was decided to march upon it at once.

Quétineau was fully aware of his danger. A few hours before the arrival of the rebel troops he

had written to the Council of Defence at Tours, to describe his situation in the strongest terms; threatened by three columns of the enemy, each containing from 10,000 to 12,000 men, "as ardent and brave as mine are lukewarm and indifferent"—his division consisting only of some 3,000. He likewise complained of the fashion in which, so soon as he had reduced his fresh recruits to anything approaching to order, they were removed and replaced by raw levies. For his own part he desired victory or death.

The last he was quickly to obtain, although not in honourable fight. The Committee of Public Safety recognised one proof alone of fidelity—success; and he was to pay, like other republican generals, for failure with his head, accused of having delivered over Thouars to the enemy.

Bressuire had been evacuated on May 3. By the 7th the royalists had reached Thouars. Their arrival is described by a republican officer: "At six o'clock in the morning the brigands appeared. They were a multitude. . . . At the head of the bands the chiefs were riding, with their white plumes. Priests were to be seen, and women were in the ranks. The chanting of litanies and death-cries reached us."[1]

Fighting began at once, and continued till five in the afternoon, when the town capitulated. All the chiefs of Upper Vendée took part in the attack. D'Elbée was there, with Bonchamps, Cathelineau, Stofflet, and Sapinaud—the men who had become used to victory. Lescure and La Rochejacquelein, henceforth constantly side by side in the struggle, were fighting for the first time together, in charge

[1] *La Vendée en* 1793, Fr. Grille.

of one division of the army. Lescure, by his exploits, his indifference to danger, and what looked like recklessness in exposing himself to it, indemnified himself for the fact that he was later than the rest in the field, and won the admiration of all. A passage in his wife's memoirs shows that what might have been taken for rash hardihood was partly deliberate and not without a purpose. "He told me why he exposed himself so singularly," she wrote of this day's fight—"first, because the joy of finding himself engaged in his first battle had caused him to lose his head and had rendered him bold to excess; secondly, that perceiving that it was essential to inspire the peasants with confidence, he wished to show on the spot that he deserved it."

If such was his object he succeeded; the idea even got abroad that he was miraculously protected and that safety lay in following him. M. Grille, a Vendean born and a boy at the time of the war, gives a picture, from the point of view of a patriot, of the man who was one of the foremost royalist generals. "Lescure," he says, "is grave, austere, inspired. He marches with his sword sheathed at the head of columns. He directs the combat, and fights with his eye alone. He says, 'Go here,' 'Go there,' and they hasten to do his bidding, were it to lead to certain death."[1]

La Rochejacquelein, for his part—youth personified—was practising the art of war, still new to him, as if at a festival. As, again and again, he braved death and remained unhurt, it would not have been strange had he come to imagine that he bore a charmed life; whilst the peasants, of whom he was always the

[1] *La Vendée en* 1793, Fr. Grille.

idol, watched his gay audacity with cries of "*Vive M. Henri!* The good God is with him. The Blues are lost."

The success of the royalists at Thouars seems scarcely, after the first, to have been in doubt. Some at least of the defenders were half-hearted in the republican cause; and the same officer who described the arrival of the Vendean troops complained that when he asked for reinforcements he was sent only peasants, who fled instead of fighting. "The brigands also have peasants," he added, "but they are fanatics, determined, intrepid. Ours are indifferent, destitute of sense—*mous*. They would rather serve against than for us." [1]

Yet the absence of gunpowder might have made it uncertain whether the town could be taken by assault.

"I have only three more charges," the master-gunner told La Bouëre, in charge of the artillery.

"*Eh bien*, fire all the same," was the reply. "We will seek more ammunition in the town."

The order was obeyed, and at the first or second discharge the Blues fell back. Nevertheless the defence was obstinate. Quétineau was slow to yield to necessity; the local authorities were slower.

"If I had a pistol I would blow out my brains," cried one official as the General demonstrated to the municipality the impossibility of continuing the contest. In bitter jest the soldier drew out the one he wore and offered it to the boaster. There were brave men amongst the Blues. The Chasseurs du Midi fought gallantly, and when surrender was inevitable were so indignant at the sight of the flag of truce,

[1] *La Vendée en* 1793, Fr. Grille.

that they tore it three times out of Quétineau's hands before they would permit terms to be made with the enemy. The Marseillais, said by Barère to have fought till no more than six of them were left alive, distinguished themselves less. According to Quétineau's *Mémoire Justificatif* most of them had already deserted, and of those who remained only two lost their lives. It was plain that further resistance was vain, and by evening the town was in the hands of the rebels.

The victory was unstained by any acts of violence or cruelty.[1] At this time the peasants would absolutely refuse to kill a man in cold blood, and although the presence of foreign deserters in their ranks afterwards made a difference in this respect, they rarely did so until after the passage of the Loire.[2] The moderation shown at Thouars was the more remarkable because, during the abortive insurrection of August 1792, the town had witnessed scenes which might have seemed to invite reprisals. None were made. "Though the town," observed Napoleon, "had been in truth carried by assault, the terms of capitulation were observed. What is noteworthy is that no acts of vengeance were committed." "The enemy," wrote Tallien, from Tours, to the Convention, "treated all well, save two or three soldiers who attempted to escape."

[1] The clemency shown towards the prisoners is attributed by Maurice Duvignet, in his *Souvenirs*, to a threat of reprisals on the part of the republican authorities, in default of which he charges Stofflet with the intention of putting them to death. His assertion is uncorroborated, and Duvignet was a raw recruit of eighteen, a prisoner, and fearing for his life.

[2] *Souvenirs*, A. de Béjarry.

No acts of pillage were committed; food was accepted, but not exacted—with one significant exception—"abundance of wine was demanded." [1]

Flocking to the churches, the royalists set the joybells ringing and relinquished the idea of retaliation; the tree of liberty was cut down, an old woman picking up the fragments and storing them in her apron whilst she shouted encouragement to those who were demolishing it.

"Courage, courage, children," she cried. "Rid us quickly of that tree of misfortune. *Vivent le bon Dieu et notre bon Roi!* To the devil with the Blues!" [2]

Prisoners, to the number of more than 5,000, were in the hands of the rebels. Of these any who were disposed to join their victors were invited to enter their ranks; others were as usual required to pledge themselves not to bear arms in future against the royalist cause. Safe conducts were given to those of the National Guard who had come to La Vendée to fight; the signatures of the royalist officers attached to these passports proving afterwards the ruin of their families and relations, as affording evidence against those who signed them.

General Quétineau, treated with marked courtesy, was lodged in the same house as the royalist leaders. Lescure and he were old acquaintances and on friendly terms. He had seen the shuttered windows of the house where the royalist party were confined as he quitted Bressuire, so he observed to Lescure, nor was it from forgetfulness that he had left him behind.

The Vendean chief was not to be outdone in courtesy.

[1] *La Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

[2] *Souvenirs*, Maurice Duvignet.

"You are free," he told the General, "and may leave us when you please. But I would advise you to remain. Our opinions differ; therefore we shall not expect you to fight on our side; but as a prisoner upon parole you will be treated well." Whereas, should Quétineau elect to return to the republicans, Lescure prophesied that he would not be forgiven his defeat.

Quétineau no doubt knew that the warning was justified. Nevertheless he refused the offer. Should he accept it, he would be believed to be a traitor and would be dishonoured. A paper was therefore signed by the Vendean leaders as well as by their prisoner, giving the latter his liberty. It ran thus:

"We, the generals of the Catholic and royalist army, permit M. Pierre Quétineau, brevet-lieutenant-colonel of a battalion of volunteers, commanding the garrison of Thouars, to go whither he will, being convinced that honour will constrain him, so long as he shall remain a prisoner, not to carry arms against us unless an exchange or other rightful arrangement shall have delivered him from his captivity. He will be equally bound, so we hope, to give a faithful and sincere account of our humane and generous treatment of the troops under his orders who have been made prisoners."

The departure of Quétineau will have been viewed with unmixed satisfaction by the soldiers of the royalist army. The chivalry displayed in the conduct of their leaders towards a republican general did not meet with their approval; and when it was discovered by the men under Bonchamps' command that their general was sharing his own bedroom with the prisoner, they entreated him to have greater

regard for his safety. Summarily dismissed by Bonchamps, they took independent measures to protect him from danger, returning to the house after he had retired to rest, and remaining on guard on the stairs; whilst one of them—who had been his gamekeeper—crept into his room after he was asleep and remained watching at the foot of his bed until morning.

Nor was this a solitary instance of the anxiety felt by the peasants at what they considered their general's rash confidence in the honour of his enemies. Wounded on a later occasion, and carried to Jallais, Bonchamps did not hesitate, in spite of their protests, no royalist surgeon being at hand, to consign himself to the care of a republican prisoner of the medical profession, and attributed his prompt recovery to his treatment.

If the Vendeans had augured well from the fact that the venerated gun, Marie-Jeanne, had been recaptured, another acquisition, made after the victory of Thouars, caused even greater rejoicing. At this point in the history of the war appears upon the scene the curious and ambiguous figure of the man calling himself Bishop of Agra—one of those singular characters that are here and there to be found, full of inexplicable contrasts. A fraud, using religion as a stepping-stone to serve an idle vanity or further his ambition, yet gentle and humble; unprincipled and unscrupulous, yet meeting death bravely in the cause he had adopted,—such was the Abbé Guyot de Folleville. Acting as a priest at Dol in pre-revolutionary days, he had not refused to take the civil oath, but, repenting of his submission, had retracted it and had taken refuge

either in a convent or with a relation at Poitiers, where he passed as a layman with the authorities. To the nuns of the order of La Sagesse and others of like sympathies he told a strange story. He had, he said, been named Bishop of Agra *in partibus infidelium*, had been privately consecrated, and had further had conferred upon him by Rome full episcopal powers over those western dioceses whose sees were at present vacant. No doubts were entertained by the nuns as to the truth of his assertions, and he was treated by them with the honour and respect due to his supposed office. It was this person, who, after the capture of Thouars, was found in the town, having been forced in his lay character to enlist in a battalion of volunteers sent to reinforce the republican garrison. Making himself known to the royalist leaders as Monseigneur of Agra, he repeated the tale he had told at Poitiers, and was accepted by them in his assumed character with cordiality and respect. Acting up to his part, he proceeded at once to Mortagne, where all the neighbouring priests flocked to pay their respects to him, and admitted to the priesthood several young men awaiting ordination.

The question has been raised as to whether the Vendean chiefs had been the genuine dupes of Guyot's deception, or had deliberately played into his hands with a view of obtaining the presence of a reputed Bishop and his countenance and help. To this opinion Michelet inclines, and the charge is supported by the statement of Béjarry, aide de camp to M. de Royrand, to the effect that he and some other officers laughed over the affair "*tout bas*." But in the absence of evidence, it is scarcely credible that men such as

Cathelineau, called the saint of Anjou, or Lescure, the saint of Poitou, to say nothing of the majority of the leaders, admitted on all hands to be honourable and high-minded men, should have consented to make a tool of religion and to support an impostor.

The course pursued by the play-acting prelate would seem to have been dictated by simple vanity. To the peasants the honour and glory of possessing a Bishop of their own was incalculable, and he was received with enthusiasm.

It had been decided, after the victory at Thouars, to march upon Fontenay, the capital of Lower Poitiers, Parthenay and La Châtaignerie being taken on the way. The first of these towns had been evacuated before it was reached by the royalist troops; but at La Châtaignerie a fight took place, when they were again victorious. Deserters from the Blues were joining their ranks, cordially welcomed by the chiefs, and although the peasants—as in the case of Quétineau—were inclined to distrust republican good faith and to keep a suspicious eye upon their new comrades, on more than one occasion the Blues proved that they knew what honour was. When the fight at La Châtaignerie was beginning, a company of grenadiers had been surprised asleep by a body of Vendeans under the lad Forestier. After a vain resistance they surrendered and were laying down their arms when one of their number rushed forward and struck at Forestier with his bayonet. The latter parried the blow and was unhurt. The comrades of the traitor, however, executed justice upon him promptly, and he fell dead. Again, a group of six dragoons, who had deserted to the Catholic Army at Parthenay and had been made to feel the distrust of the Vendean

peasants, proved their fidelity to their new colours by fighting so recklessly that, seeing one of them fall, the royalist soldiers shouted to the survivors that they were satisfied.

"Enough, dragoons—enough," they cried. "You are brave men."

La Châtaignerie was captured. The Blues had fought heroically against overwhelming numbers; until, seized by one of the sudden panics to which unseasoned soldiers must inevitably be subject, they fled in confusion and left the royalists masters of the town.

As the Vendeans entered it a sinister spectacle met their eyes. In the market-place stood a guillotine, stained with Vendean blood—one of five, perhaps, that had been ordered as early as March 25, when the rebellion was in its infancy, for distribution amongst the western departments. It was broken in pieces by the soldiers, but the sight of the instrument of death may have had a bad effect, and at La Châtaignerie acts of insubordination were committed, houses of noted patriots robbed and pillaged, nor were the lives of prisoners safe. "We are killing those who have killed our friends, their wives and their children," the men answered La Rochejacquelein when he rushed to the rescue of the unhappy victims; and, forced to forego further vengeance, they were for once ill-content with their leaders, and many of them, in sullen displeasure, turned their steps homeward.

The garrison at La Châtaignerie had been commanded by General Chalbos and his retreat was made in good order, guns and ammunition being carried away in safety. He now sent an urgent appeal to

the Minister of War. He had been a private soldier, raised abruptly to the rank of general, and wrote bluntly. "The old candour characteristic of me," he said, "causes me to tell you the whole truth. It is time to take strong measures if the fanatics with whom we are to fight are to be reduced to submission." His colleagues everywhere were echoing the warning—Ligonnier, in temporary chief command, "*malgré moi*," of the republican forces, pending the arrival of Biron, made no secret of his uneasiness. "I like better to obey than to command," he wrote. "I am without capable co-operators." Dayat, another general, also wrote that he had sent to Niort for reinforcements, but knew not whether he would obtain them. His artillery consisted of one four-pounder and a couple of two-pounders. "You see it is not enough," he added simply. Nevertheless, had the republicans been in a position to take advantage of it, an opportunity at this time offered of effecting a change in the aspect of affairs. The Vendean peasants had been under arms for a longer consecutive period than usual, and were craving to return for a time, as was their custom, to their homes. With this spirit abroad, it was difficult or impossible to keep them together, and by May 16, out of the multitudes who had marched against Thouars on the 7th, not more than some 10,000 remained, nearly a third of whom were raw levies hastily raised to meet the present need.

Under these circumstances it was not to be wondered at that their career of victory received a serious check. Chalbos had been sent reinforcements from Saumur. A certain general named Sandoz, recently dispatched to the scene of war, and chiefly

remarkable by reason of his boasts, was in command of the infantry; and though La Rochejacquelein and Lescure obtained some success at the opening of the battle which took place at Fontenay, it ended in the complete rout of the royalist army. D'Elbée was wounded, 200 men were taken prisoners, guns, rifles, baggage were lost; above all, Marie-Jeanne was once again in the hands of the enemy.

At this juncture the special characteristic which was alike the strength and the weakness of the Vendean army was signally displayed. In a few hours, as if by magic, it had vanished, melting away into thin air. Yesterday the enemy had an army before them, to be fought and defeated. To-day there was no object at which a blow could be directed, no regiments, no battalions—simply thousands of peasants, each in his own home, defeated indeed, and perhaps smarting under the consciousness of defeat, but who could be only reached for punishment or destruction singly and by a lengthy process. That this was the case explains, though it cannot justify, the policy afterwards pursued by the Government in laying waste the country, and thus depriving the inhabitants of their places of shelter and refuge.

To the royalist leaders the moment must have brought something like despair. In this emergency Cathelineau, the man who had first raised the standard of revolt, was to show that his spell had not lost its power. Calm, confident, and unconquered, he proved that he knew how to treat his countrymen in disaster as well as in victory. Some two or three days he left them to themselves, to their homes, and to rest. Then, going from parish to parish in person, he roused them again to the fight.

"What has happened is a blow at the armies of La Vendée," he said. "It is a punishment for the excesses committed by some men at La Châtaignerie. This check must be counteracted. I have traced out a plan. Will you refuse to march with me?"

La Vendée did not refuse. At the word of its chief, it once more took up arms. Thirty-five thousand men collected at Châtillon, denuded of almost all the necessaries of war, yet ready to fight. Priests encouraged them; the sham Bishop of Agra, in pontifical vestments, entered the town, the bells pealing a welcome, and gave his blessing to the undertaking. Repentance for the misdeeds of La Châtaignerie mingled with confidence in future success, and the army moved towards Fontenay, singing litanies as they went.

It was no light enterprise that was to be attempted. The Blues had taken heart after their recent victory. Sandoz especially, appropriating the credit of it, had announced the defeat of the rebels to the Parisian authorities in glowing terms.

"I have nothing but praise for the soldiers," he wrote; "all, even our recruits, braved death and avenged liberty. . . . The Catholic army is at length at bay, and has more confidence in its legs than in the thunderbolts of the God Whom it has outraged. Be sure that this will not be our last victory. Before I take rest, I desire to purify the land of liberty from its enemies."

The war was in some other quarters thought to be at an end. "The enemy is cast down by his last defeat," wrote a representative to General Boulard. "I can scarcely believe they will ever again dare to face us."

In Paris itself the victory of the 16th had inspired the hope that the end of the war might be at hand, and in the proclamation addressed to the peasants ten days later an appeal was made well calculated, had La Vendée shared the pre-revolutionary condition and the present sentiments of the rest of France, to recall them to their duty. What crime, it was asked, had been committed towards them by the Revolution, save the conquest of a liberty they shared? The nobles, their chiefs, demanded a King in order that their bondage might be re-established. The rebels desired to retain their religion, but who had attempted to rob them of it? If the priests they regarded as their only legitimate ministers had been removed, had they not justified the step by preaching murder and pillage to-day? Was English gold given to save a religion England despised, or was it in order that France might be torn by internal dissension, that the blood of the Vendeans might be shed in the cause of slavery and the blood of the republic in the cause of liberty—in any case the blood of Frenchmen? "Show yourselves worthy once more of the name of Frenchmen; you will then find none but brothers in the whole of the Republic—the Republic which takes up arms to punish you with regret, and, though ready to crush you by her power, would weep for successes purchased at the price of your blood."

The appeal fell on deaf ears. La Vendée had taken its side and was not to be propitiated. Even before the proclamation was issued the situation had again altered, and shame and humiliation had been exchanged for gladness.

The confident mood in which the Blues saw the

reconstructed Vendean army approach Fontenay was not destined to be of long duration. The official summarised account of their defeat was sent on the following day to the War Minister, and tells its own story :

"The cannonade lasted about an hour. The enemy, without any guns, advanced in three columns. The musketry fire was kept up, but the cavalry not giving way disorder ensued amongst the [republican] troops, and flight became general. . . . The number of prisoners and of dead is unknown. Several cannons have been abandoned, even that so much regretted by the enemy, Marie-Jeanne. Considerable stores of grain are in the power of the enemy, who are engaged in carrying them away. We have to do with an antagonist who braves every danger."

The story is told more in detail by the Vendean writers. At midday, when the battle was about to begin, the May sun was shining brightly; the peasants were still at prayer, and ready for the fight, although they knew themselves to be destitute of munitions of war.

"*Allons, les gars,*" cried Henri de La Rochejacquelein, "there is no powder in your pockets. The Blues have got some!"

When Lescure gave the men under his command the signal to attack, they wavered and hung back. Alone, he advanced, then stood waving his hat with the shout "*Vive le Roi!*" As a shower of bullets answered him he turned, unwounded, to his men.

"You see, *mes amis,*" he cried, cheerily, "the Blues do not know how to shoot."

At the words the peasants rushed forward; then, passing a cross that was standing by the roadside,

they fell on their knees, regardless alike of the fire of the enemy and the orders of their officers.

"Let them be," was Lescure's order—he was praying himself—"they will fight the better for it."[1]

Cartridges were lacking for the few guns which it appears the rebels had in their hands, and the master-gunner applied to Marigny, in command of the artillery, for more.

"There they are," he replied, pointing to the republican batteries; and ten minutes later they had been obtained.

The spirit of reckless gallantry was associated with chivalry in the royalist leaders. La Rochejacquelein had mutely challenged an officer of the 13th Chasseurs to single combat, when suddenly the horse of the republican gave way under him.

"Yield," cried the boy. "I promise you your life."

For all answer the man, armed with pistols, took aim at his opponent, fired, and missed.

"I have had my satisfaction, now take yours," he cried, as he flung his weapons down.

"My satisfaction is to let you live," answered the Vendean, as he threw himself into the *mêlée*.

The royalists had no monopoly of heroism. A republican named Beaupuy, brother of the general afterwards noted in the war, surrounded by Vendean horsemen, refused with scorn to lay down his arms.

"To conquer or to die," he said. "I do not surrender to rebels"; and with the words on his lips he fell.

Bonchamps had been the first to enter the captured

[1] *La Vendée Patriote*, Chassin.

town, closely followed by Lescure, finding the streets full of flying soldiers, some of whom implored mercy on their knees.

"Lay down your arms," answered the Vendeans. "Cry '*Vive le Roi!*' and you shall come to no harm."

One of these patriots had flung himself before Bonchamps' horse. He was, he said, the father of seven children. His plea was admitted, and liberty and life were granted him; when turning he fired at the man who had bestowed them. Falling dangerously wounded, Bonchamps bade Lescure hasten to the prisons and secure the safety of the royalist captives. As Lescure went to do his bidding, the soldiers of Bonchamps' division fell upon the comrades of the man by whom he had been wounded, and for the moment it was impossible to restrain them. Surrounding the street where the deed had been done, they had slain sixty patriots before Lescure, returning, could calm their fury.

The royalist victory was complete. Guns, cannon, all, were left in the hands of the Vendeans, even Marie-Jeanne, which had been at first removed by the defeated troops, being followed, rescued, and brought back in triumph. "It was a sight," says Mercier du Rocher, "worthy at once of horror and pity, to see these unhappy men, their rosaries in their hands and their guns under their arms, praying to Heaven on their knees and kissing with tears of joy the famous piece of cannon. It was covered with flowers and ribands and taken to the church of Notre Dame, where a Te Deum was sung amidst the most enthusiastic acclamation."[1]

[1] *La Vendée Patriote*, Chassin.

A certain amount of pillage took place, especially in the matter of food, wine, and clothes; a republican letter stating that whilst it had not been carried on to as large an extent as might have been feared, aristocrats had suffered no less than patriots.[1]

The memory of the first battle of Fontenay had been wiped out, and the hopes of the royalists were higher than ever. A letter from the representative, Goupilleau, to his colleague and friend, Maignen, indicates the light in which the affair was regarded by the authorities in the west:

"I write to you with grief in my heart and shame on my brow. They"—the Government—"have persisted, in spite of all we can say, in treating this war as a simple insurrection. I tell you that it is a volcano which will terrify the whole Republic if it is not extinguished."

[1] *La Vendée Patriote*, Chassin.

CHAPTER VIII

MAY—JUNE

Lower Vendée and Charette—Lack of co-operation—The Superior Council—The Abbé Bernier—Policy of the Government—Biron in command—Royalist successes—Saumur taken.

SIDE by side with the conflict in Upper Vendée, and, though scarcely touching it at any point, exercising an important influence upon its chances of success was the struggle carried on in the districts nearer the sea of which Machecoul was the centre. It was a struggle headed by a number of leaders—of whom Charette was soon to prove himself chief—acting at this time independently not only of the Grande Armée, but in great measure of each other, the jealousy and rivalry prevailing amongst them presenting a marked contrast to the relations existing between the generals of Upper Vendée. It is impossible to avoid speculating upon the consequences, had concerted action been maintained amongst all the revolted royalists. If it might not have ensured success, it would have added immeasurably to the chances of it. To Charette the blame for the absence of cohesion has been generally ascribed, and there is no doubt that as the war proceeded and he gained increased power and strength, the charge is largely justified. But in these early days, when he underwent a series of defeats, there is nothing to prove that he would have been unwilling to join his forces with others ; and upon Royrand, commanding the

troops in the tract of country lying between the districts occupied by the Grande Armée and those where Charette was fighting, lies the responsibility of having discouraged his advances. One of the few older officers amongst the royalists and a chevalier of St. Louis, Royrand was not a man to be attracted by a bold adventurer; and when Charette, finding himself in a precarious condition, sent to Montaigu, Royrand's head quarters, to announce his approach, the answer returned made it clear that the older man had no desire to receive into his camp the soldier of fortune called by his enemies in contempt "*le cadet de marine*."

As Charette turned away, with his handful of followers, to seek shelter elsewhere, the rebuff could not fail to rankle, nor was the memory of it erased when Royrand, quickly repenting of having failed a comrade in need, hastened after him to offer what assistance he might require. By this time the adventurer had gained one of his brilliant triumphs over a republican body, and congratulations, rather than support, were called for.

"It was better than coming to Montaigu, Charette," said the chevalier, not without embarrassment.

"I was going there," answered the other coldly, "with good intentions you failed to recognise. You did me a service without being aware of it."

It was a bad beginning, and though Royrand is said to have made what amends he could, and a reconciliation was effected, the incident must have left a sting behind it and have lent force to Charette's natural disinclination to make common cause with men who were his rivals and considered themselves his superiors. Royrand, for his part, continued to

F. A. CHARETTE DE LA CONTRIE.

From an engraving.

regard him with mistrust, nor was there any genuine co-operation between the two leaders.

Royrand, at this date, though in full sympathy with the chiefs of the Grande Armée, and detaching troops to reinforce them at need—he had done so at Fontenay—was exercising a separate command, so that they cannot be held responsible for the serious blunder involved in any action tending to estrange the royalist forces in Lower Vendée from the men fighting in the same cause elsewhere. Of the attitude of Cathelineau, d'Elbée, Bonchamps, Lescure, and the rest of their brothers-in-arms the evidence at this stage of the war is mostly negative, and is contained in the absence of any sign of intercommunication. It is possible that reports reaching them of the reputation borne by Charette's camp, of the life led there whenever a temporary lull in hostilities occurred, its amusements and entertainments, did not commend themselves to the severer taste and morals of the Upper Vendean chiefs. At Légé, where he had established his head quarters, his lieutenant, Championnière, wrote that for long there was no occupation but pleasure. "Many ladies of the district came to live in the cantonment, the most beautiful of all being incontestably Madame de La Rochefoucauld. . . . It was then believed that the Mars of our troops was resting in her company from the laborious work of the war."[1]

Joly, the old surgeon commanding a separate force in Lower Vendée, had, on the other hand, complaints to make—reasonable ones, as it would seem—of the lack of intercommunication not only with Charette,

[1] *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, Bittard des Portes.

but with the chiefs of the Grande Armée, with whose exploits the country was ringing.

"The capture of Fontenay," he wrote, "has obtained munitions, cannon, equipment, money. Of what good has this been to us? The chiefs of the upper country have done this separately, without giving any one, from Chantonnay to the Marais, notice. Had there been concert, blows might have been struck at Les Sables, Luçon, and the low country towns. M. Charette proceeds with as much secrecy as the army of Anjou. Nothing that he undertakes is known. He never goes to the help of his neighbours, notwithstanding their demands. . . . Safety will lie in combination alone." [1]

If the surgeon was undoubtedly right in laying his finger upon the fatal defect in the royalist organisations, it must be repeated that Charette was not so wholly to blame as he has been often considered. It is certain that after the success at Fontenay he sent messengers to ascertain what were the plans and intentions of the victors. "I am awaiting," he wrote, "the return of four officers of my army I sent there three days ago. . . . If the Grande Armée, as I fear, marches in another direction, I will do all that is possible to combine with M. Royrand." The characters of the two men being taken into account, he would not find it easy.

Meantime, to return to the Grande Armée itself, the victory of Fontenay was unquestionably the most important as yet achieved; and with success it became necessary to establish a certain order and organisation in the revolted provinces, and to regulate the affairs of an insurrection whose progress had

[1] *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, Bittard des Portes.

been so rapid and spontaneous. The first thing, however, was to decide upon the treatment of the prisoners, whose numbers—some 3,000 had been taken at Fontenay alone—were becoming a serious difficulty. To guard and maintain them was a manifest impossibility; the practice of putting them to death had not yet been adopted in the republican camp to a degree seeming to invite if not to justify reprisals; and in the case of the captives at Fontenay they had been promised their lives on condition that they laid down their arms. To release them was to supply the enemy with additional troops, since it was found impossible to rely upon their pledge not to bear arms against the royalist army. Under these cicumstances it was suggested by Donnissan, Madame de Lescure's father, that their hair should be close-cropped, so that should they fall into the hands of the Vendeans again they would be recognised and punished for the violation of their engagement. To the world at large it would be shown that they had been captives, and the Catholic army would be vindicated from the charges of cruelty freely made against it.[1]

It was manifestly necessary to allow a breathing-time to the army before entering upon any fresh enterprise. The men were once more dispersing to their homes, and it would have been both impolitic and useless to attempt to keep them together. A proclamation put forth by Lescure from Clisson, to which he had temporarily returned, nevertheless gives an indication of a sense on the part of the leaders of an imperative need of men upon whom they

[1] Beauvais places the number of prisoners thus released during the war at 25,000 in all.

could count for something approaching to permanent service. Whilst arranging for the subsistence of the families of those engaged in the struggle, a sharp distinction was drawn between the volunteers whose services were given only for a few days at a time, and soldiers ready to follow the army for a longer period. There was indeed a suspicion of a threat in the announcement that a list would be made in each parish of the latter class, in order that the good-will or the ill-will of the various districts might be ascertained, and that from those men who did not support the cause with zeal the taxes decreed in 1772 might be levied. Curious evidence is afforded by this same document of the implicit faith placed by the Catholic leaders in the sham Bishop. Orders were issued to the priests who had not received their faculties from their legitimate prelates, to obtain them forthwith from Monseigneur l'Archevêque d'Agra, Vicaire Apostolique. All who had not, by June 9, conformed to this regulation were to be placed under arrest at Châtillon.

Measures were likewise taken to establish a species of government in the revolted provinces. This was done by the creation of a Superior Council of Administration, to sit at Châtillon, the centre of the military operations in Upper Vendée, under the presidency of the Bishop. Consisting as this body did when its numbers were complete, of some score of members, it was intended to deal with the manifold business of the insurgent area. The most prominent and influential member of the Council was the Abbé Bernier, curé of Saint-Laud of Angers. A man of twenty-nine, full of enthusiasm and gifted with a persuasive eloquence giving him unlimited

power over the peasants, he had from the first outbreak of the rebellion thrown in his lot with it, and had become "the apostle of the insurrection." Wherever there was need of consolation under disaster, or of encouragement, there Bernier was to be found, unwearied, sanguine, and inspiring hope and fervour; whilst his abilities, his prudence in counsel, foresight, and wisdom were no less remarkable. "The Abbé Bernier," says Joly-Crétineau, "had only to speak for the people to rise. His voice was a power."[1] It was not long before he had become predominant in the Council, the military chiefs being principally absent from it, absorbed in conducting the actual business of the war; nor was it till later that the confidence he inspired was clouded by mistrust; that his ambition, his love of power, and spirit of intrigue declared themselves—or may it have been that the position he had achieved acted with deteriorating force upon the genuine qualities by which it had been won?

Pierre Jagault, a Benedictine, was likewise an influential member of the Council, as well as a third priest, the Curé Brin, of less talent than Bernier, but free from his faults—a man whose zeal and fervour never failed, and whose power was ever employed to further the interests of humanity and kindliness. In the Superior Council, nevertheless, Bernier reigned supreme not only over the priests and laymen of whom it was composed, but even over the episcopal President, whose ambition appears to have been less than his vanity, and who was content in this respect to play a subordinate part.

It was Bernier who, in conjunction with the

[1] *Histoire de la Guerre de Vendée.*

chevalier Desessarts, also a member of the Council, drew up the address to the French people, which, issued from Fontenay on May 27, bore the signature of the Catholic chiefs. Calling upon their countrymen in general to take up arms and to join a movement favoured by Heaven, they drew attention, without fear of contradiction, to the contrast presented by their methods to those employed by their enemies. "They cut the throats of their prisoners in the name of the law; we have preserved ours in the name of religion and humanity. . . . If, in spite of all our efforts, some misdeeds have been committed in the towns we have conquered for our good King, we have wept for them bitterly; we have punished with signal severity the disorders we were unable to prevent. . . . Oh, fellow citizens, judge between us and our persecutors. What have they done? What are your representatives themselves doing for your happiness and for the general welfare of France? What do they do save to tear the principles of your faith from your hearts? to amass great treasure at the cost of your blood and your tears . . . to carry desolation into the bosom of your families by dragging your children, your brothers, yourselves to camps and to war? . . . Open your eyes at length, oh Frenchmen. Return to us; return to yourselves."

The appeal was vain. France as a whole, better than La Vendée, knew what she desired. Better than the western provinces, shielded as they had been from much of the misery oppressing the country in bygone days, she could estimate her own past sufferings. Nor was she, in spite of the crimes by which the Revolution had been defaced, disposed to assume once again the yoke she had found intolerable.

Meanwhile, in Paris, the victory of Fontenay had left no doubt in men's minds of the critical situation in the west. The Committee of Public Safety had done what it could to disguise from the Convention the true condition of affairs in the revolted provinces, their destitution in regard to means of defence, and the extremity of their peril. News of defeat might be received, but it was easy to minimise the disasters of the republican forces, to exaggerate what victories they obtained, and to assert that the reinforcements sent would be sufficient to ensure safety. On paper one body of men does not greatly differ from another, and companies of raw lads, ignorant of the very use of firearms, might sound as well as seasoned soldiers. The Convention, moreover, through the weeks of May, had been too deeply engrossed in its internal disputes, in the struggle between the Mountain and the Gironde, to have much attention to spare for the west. Fontenay was a fact that could not be ignored, that opened the eyes of the world at large to the astonishing successes obtained by the rebels, and made it clear that the means hitherto employed to crush them had been wholly inadequate.

It was not enough to recall, and on occasion to guillotine, generals who had failed to reduce the country to submission. More would be necessary. New and more stringent methods must be adopted; nor was the Paris of that day—the Paris of the Terror—disposed to shrink from any means, however sanguinary, calculated to achieve the object in view. Those means were foreshadowed in a report presented by Barère some weeks later on. "The Committee," he wrote, "has prepared measures tending to exterminate this rebellious Vendean race, to cause

their shelters to disappear, to burn their forests, to cut down their harvests. It is to the gangrenous wounds that the surgeon applies the iron. At Mortagne, Chollet, Chemillé, the political physician must employ like means and like remedies. Destroy La Vendée and the country is saved."

Destruction was, in fact, the policy of men who were to recognise that by no other methods could the stubborn determination of La Vendée be overcome.

A fresh army of 12,000 men was raised in Paris and dispatched forthwith to the west under the command of Santerre, now at the head of the National Guard in the capital. From Orléans, whither he had been conveyed in the royal carriages, he wrote to Paris on May 26, in magniloquent though ill-spelt terms:

"The coaches accustomed to carry crime are now conveying virtue. It is no longer the oppressors but the defenders of the Republic that they serve. . . . We are starting to join the army, and with soldiers like those of the Republic we shall be able to realise the prophecy of the President of the Commune, *Veni, vici, vidi*. . . . I will be free and republican, or I die happy."

Santerre was to share his command with Westermann, at the head of the Alpine hussars, the northern legion, and the battalions to be raised at Orléans. Both were to be under the orders of Biron, as general-in-chief of the army of the Côtes de La Rochelle, one of the two bodies into which the republican forces in the west were divided; the other, under Canclaux, being named the army of the Côtes de Brest.

On May 28 Biron at length reached Niort, there to take up his new duties. His was no enviable posi-

tion. Resident commissioners, appointed by the Convention, were to watch his operations and offer counsels; whilst the Convention itself would keep a lynx eye upon the conduct of the war, and the fate of his predecessors would act as a warning of the consequences of failure. The situation is graphically described by the republican officer, Savary: "The Minister of War sent one of his coadjutors, Ronsin, with considerable powers; he also charged two special commissioners to overlook the operations of the generals and report upon them. The Foreign Minister had likewise his commissioners. Following their example, the Commune, the Sections of Paris, sent commissioners. Ronsin created a crowd of collaborators, each bringing his own intelligence and his own opinions to the work. A conflict of reports, more or less exaggerated, were the result—rivalries, denunciations—in a word complete anarchy." With this unvarnished account Biron's description of the disorganisation and confusion he found prevailing at Niort on his arrival is in entire accord.

This being the condition of things amongst the republicans, these were the days when hope was highest in the Vendean camp. If the successes that had won the royalists their present position had been obtained by men unaccustomed to the use of arms, destitute of experience, of training, of the very rudiments of discipline, what might not be expected from troops growing familiarised with war and stimulated to fresh exertion by victory? Even the leaders who had started on the adventure convinced that it was doomed to failure must have been led to hope that they had been over-despondent; whilst to the young and sanguine the future seemed assured.

Henri de La Rochejacquelein was already anticipating —a curious testimony to his lack of worldly ambition —that the King would give him a regiment of hussars.

Saumur was to be the next point of attack. Its position on the banks of the Loire, and connecting by bridges the two provinces, rendered its possession a matter of peculiar importance, and a plan was vaguely entertained of crossing the river and making an attempt to raise Brittany.

During the interval between the victory of Fontenay and the attack on Saumur several fights had taken place. Vihiers had been seized; Ligonnier had been driven from his post at Doué; Montreuil had been captured; and victory, though at times hardly won, had remained with the royalists.

The army had assumed a more martial aspect than at first, but as M. Boutillier de Saint-André—himself a boy at the time—describes it, it still presented a singular and picturesque appearance. Most of the men were provided with guns, the artillery was plentiful and well served, the cavalry only some 1,200 strong. As the troops marched, in fairly orderly fashion, Cathelineau and the officers of the staff led the way, Bonchamps and d'Elbée being absent wounded; each parochial contingent followed separately, with its own drum and flag. In the middle came the artillery, under Marigny's command; and the cavalry, ill-armed and ill-equipped, brought up the rear. All alike wore a scapular with an image of the Sacred Heart, and "as they marched, the monotonous recitation of the rosary, said half aloud, made a murmuring sound which had something in common with the noise of waves ruffled by the wind. . . . To watch such a march," adds M. de Saint-André,

caused one to dream and to smile, giving rise at once to confidence and apprehension . . . and producing an impression of a wild pomp perfectly in keeping with the men and the place." [1]

Their victories had raised the enthusiasm of the peasants to fever height, and they were eager to attack Saumur. This was a serious enterprise, the importance of the town being fully recognised by the enemy and the republican forces more or less concentrated upon its defence. Menou, with several generals under him, was chief in command, Santerre only arriving at the town on the eve of the attack. It was clear that on this occasion the trial of strength would be severe. At the beginning of the second week in June it took place.

Some writers have asserted that on the night before the battle La Rochejacquelein dined, in the disguise of a peasant, in the town itself; but though the adventure was likely enough to have commended itself to his bold and reckless spirit, the story is uncorroborated by royalist authorities, and it is certain that he was busy arranging a plan of attack; intending that some three hundred horsemen should harass the enemy beforehand and divert their attention from the movements of the main Vendean body —a scheme frustrated by the undisciplined ardour of the soldiers, who, hearing what was in contemplation, refused to be left behind.

"*Vive le Roi!*" was the general shout. "We are going to Saumur." It was impossible to restrain them, and the former project was abandoned.

The eve of the battle was come. In the Vendean camp the old Latin hymn, "*Vexilla regis prodeunt*"

[1] *Souvenirs*, Boutillier de Saint-André.

—"The royal banners forward go"—was sung, and the men prepared themselves by confession for the morrow's fight. They were ready, if need be, to die.

Preparations for the attack were hurried on; the army was impatient. Within the town the suspicion gained ground that treachery was at work, a gunner having been detected in the act of spiking a piece of artillery. Santerre, the latest arrival, may have begun to doubt whether his task was as easy as he had imagined. Quétineau, his failure at Thouars fresh in his memory, was a prisoner in the fortress, awaiting his trial. Confusion, disorganisation, were everywhere.

By three in the afternoon it became known that the Vendean army was approaching; an hour later firing had begun, as the royalists advanced in three separate columns, directed upon different points of attack. At first it seemed that the fortunes of the day might go against them. Almost as the battle began Lescure was wounded, and, seeing it, the men he led fell back.

"It is nothing, *mes amis*," he cried. "I remain under fire."

Other reverses followed. Dommaigné, in command of the cavalry, was killed; at more than one point the peasants were giving way, and it must have been clear that the result of the fight was uncertain. But the Vendean leaders knew the men with whom they had to deal. Suddenly La Rochejacquelein bared his head and threw his hat over the fortifications.

"Who will fetch it for me?" he cried, as, closely followed by Cathelineau, he sprang into the redoubt.

It was the turning-point in the fray. At eight that evening the republican general, Coustard, saw that

the situation was desperate. Only one chance seemed to him to be left, and he took it, regardless of the risk and almost certainty of failure; directing Weissen, the officer in charge of a body of cuirassiers, to bar the way of the advancing force by seizing a battery set up by the Vendeans. For a moment Weissen marvelled at the order.

"Where are you sending me, general?" he asked.

"To death," was the reply—"*Vive la République!*" and Weissen went, not indeed, as it proved, to die, but to return, unsupported, his men slain and himself covered with wounds.

Everywhere the republicans were losing ground. Menou, the commander-in-chief, was wounded, as well as General Berthier; the royalist army were flooding the approaches to the town. Yet the firing from the château continued, and defeat had not yet been acknowledged, when La Rochejacquelein again performed one of those feats of foolhardy courage for which he was noted. Accompanied, according to Savary, the republican, by only four officers, according to Madame de La Rochejacquelein, by one, he entered the town, proceeded to the principal street, full of flying soldiers who did not attempt to bar his way, and penetrated to the very base of the château itself, where a retreating battalion left the way open before him. Setting his back to the wall of the theatre, he stood, a mark for the guns still discharged from the château, as he fired upon the flying enemy; then, turning a couple of cannon they had abandoned upon the château, assailed it with its own powder and shot. Joined presently by some sixty men he was soon pursuing the Blues on the road to Tours; after which he returned to

the town to inquire whether it had yet been entered by the royalists.

The vanguard of the army had pressed in, and it was presently followed by the main body—from 25,000 to 30,000 strong. Instead, however, of pursuing the enemy—it is a republican who tells it[1]—the troops poured into the churches, there to give thanks to God for their victory.

The château still held out; but, unprovided with what would have been necessary to stand a siege, its capitulation could be a matter of no more than a few hours. On the morrow, accordingly, the garrison surrendered, the officers retaining their swords, and the men, leaving their arms behind them, being permitted to return to their homes. The royalist victory was complete.

Between Quétineau, left in his place of confinement, and his old acquaintance, Lescure, another interview took place. Again the republican general was invited to cut himself free from the men at whose hands he had suffered injury and mistrust, who had doubted his honour and had put him on his trial. On the one hand imprisonment and death awaited him; on the other respect and safety.

"We will do you more justice than your patriots," Lescure told him.

It was doubtless true, and Quétineau knew it. Yet he chose death rather than what bore the semblance of dishonour. Were he free, he replied, it would be to return to his prison. He had done his duty and it should be proved by trial. Also, to act otherwise would be to abandon his wife and to leave her to suffer for his sake.

[1] *Guerre des Vendéens*, Savary.

He had prepared a written justification of his conduct and gave it to Lescure to read, that he might witness to its truth. Then, turning to public affairs,

"The Austrians are masters of Flanders," he said mournfully. "You, monsieur, are also victorious. A counter-revolution is at hand. France will be dismembered by foreigners."

Lescure vehemently repudiated the suggestion. That, he declared, would never be permitted by the royalists. In such a case they would fight with no less ardour in defence of the country.

"Ah," said Quétineau, "then I should serve with you. I love glory. I love my country; and thus I am a patriot."

The interview was interrupted. Below, in the street outside, the townspeople, siding with the conquerors, were shouting "*Vive le Roi!*" From the window the republican general flung reproaches at them.

Lescure's forecast was fulfilled. At Paris Quétineau suffered the death penalty. The wife for whose safety he had taken thought, refusing to survive him, secured her own fate by crying aloud, before the Revolutionary Tribunal, "*Vive le Roi!*" and so followed him to the scaffold.

The day after the victory La Rochejacquelein, leaning on a window-frame, had been observed to remain for two hours absorbed in thought. A brother officer, noting it with surprise, questioned him. What was he doing there?

"I am thinking of our successes," was the boy's reply. "I am confounded by them. All comes from God."

And thus Saumur fell. The material gain to the royalist army was immense, the moral gain greater still. More than 60 pieces of cannon fell into the hands of the victors, with 20,000 guns, and all kinds of munitions of war, at the cost of no more than 60 men killed and 400 wounded. Public magazines and offices were pillaged, but private property was for the most part scrupulously respected, and prisoners were treated with kindness.

A certain number of Swiss and Germans who had fought under the republican flag accepted the offers of the Vendean leaders, and took service in the royalist army. They were to prove good soldiers, but in some respects their presence had a bad effect, and they are said to have introduced amongst the peasants habits of pillage, and to have changed in some degree the character of the war.[1]

[1] *Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau. *La Vendée en* 1793, Fr. Grille.

CHAPTER IX

JUNE

Alternatives considered — Nantes to be attacked — Cathelineau General-in-Chief—New recruits—The Prince de Talmont—Angers evacuated—Co-operation of Charette — Condition of Nantes—Its siege—Death of Cathelineau—Royalist defeat.

WHEN the question how best to turn to account the victory achieved at Saumur was discussed, a certain diversity of opinion prevailed amongst the royalist leaders.

Some—Stofflet amongst them—were in favour of marching upon Paris itself. La Rochejacquelein would have pushed at least as far as Tours, in the belief that, were the white standard raised in the central provinces, the inhabitants would rally round it. But the absence, for the most part, of cavalry would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to carry out this scheme, more especially considering the reluctance of the mass of the troops to leave their homes at any distance behind them. France, beyond the limits of their own province, came near to being a foreign country, and to the Vendean an unknown land was abhorrent.

Lescure and others desired to move towards the sea, making Niort and La Rochelle the objective of their march. Bonchamps, who, with d'Elbée, had rejoined the army, would have liked to enter Brittany and join forces with the Chouans. The disposition of Normandy could then be sounded, and it could

be ascertained whether the disaffection known to exist there was Girondist or royalist—a point still in doubt. It appears indeed that Bonchamps' eyes were always inclined to turn wistfully towards Brittany, where he had, according to his wife, *des intelligences* of his own. He had volunteered at an earlier date to cross the Loire with his division alone; and he now suggested entering the province whilst the prestige of victory attached to the Grande Armée, and seeking to raise it *en masse* as Vendée itself had been raised.[1] The constant mention of the Bretons amongst his soldiers implies that not a few of them were already under his orders; and that his troops were not wholly composed of the Vendean peasants, brave and undisciplined, and liable to disperse to their homes, may account for the fact that his division, in contrast with others, had the appearance of being made up of regular soldiers, who remained on duty and submitted to military discipline.[2]

Had Bonchamps' plan been adopted at this date it might have had a chance of success. The help of England was all-important, and England could only be expected to intervene on condition of a port being secured. That end might have been attained had either Bonchamps' or Lescure's wishes prevailed. D'Elbée, however, was opposed to a scheme which would have shifted the battlefield from La Vendée, and it was in the end determined to make Nantes the present goal of the army.

The decision was not taken without hot discussion, Stofflet, ever inclined to violence, going so far as to challenge Bonchamps to fight a duel, a challenge

[1] *Mémoires de Madame de Bonchamps.*

[2] *Mémoires*, Boutillier de Saint-André.

declined by the latter with equal grace and good temper.

"No, monsieur," he answered courteously, "I will not accept your challenge. God and the King can alone dispose of my life, and France would be too greatly the loser were she to be deprived of yours."

Whatever was to be said for the course advocated by Bonchamps, in the estimation of so great a master of the art of war as Napoleon the determination to march upon Nantes was a right one. If the enterprise was hazardous, the advantages to be gained by success were worth the risk.

"Masters of this great town, and assured of the arrival of English ships, the royal armies could safely manœuvre on both banks of the Loire. If, profiting by their amazing successes, Charette and Cathelineau had then united their resources and marched on the capital, it would have been all over with the Republic. Nothing would have stopped the triumphant progress of the royal armies. The white flag would have floated from the towers of Notre Dame before it would have been possible for the armies of the Rhine to come to the help of their Government."

Another matter, besides the destination of the army, was to be settled before Saumur was left. It was felt that the condition of the troops under generals independent of each other and exercising separate commands, was unsatisfactory and that a commander-in-chief should be appointed. The choice fell unanimously upon Cathelineau, and he was invested with the supreme authority.

The election of a peasant to the post corroborates the assertion that La Vendée, in spite of its royalist name, was republican at heart. Equality had ever

prevailed in the army, and the military chiefs were solely anxious to place over the troops the man best calculated to serve the common cause. That man was in their opinion the peasant Cathelineau—Cathelineau who had been the first to raise the standard of revolt, and who possessed an influence surpassing that of any other officer.

In the presence of all the chiefs who had taken part in the battle at Saumur, Lescure, as spokesman, expressed their conviction of the urgent necessity for the election of a commander-in-chief, and one who by virtue, talents, and courage would fill the position worthily. "This chief is pointed out by the very nature of the war we have undertaken. M. Cathelineau was the first to take up arms, the first to teach the Vendeans how easy a thing it is, with faith in God, to conquer. I propose, therefore, to the council that M. Cathelineau shall be forthwith elected."

The response was unanimous, the leaders absent from the meeting concurring cordially in the choice made by their colleagues. Cathelineau himself, it was said, was the only man in the army who disapproved it. Humble, diffident, devoid of all personal aims, he judged himself unfit for the post, and it was necessary to constrain him to accept it.

Amongst the rank and file of the army the election was welcomed with enthusiasm, and Cathelineau, surrounded by the generals, received an ovation. The bells were set ringing and salutes fired from the captured cannon, even Quétineau joining in the universal congratulations, though adding a note of warning.

"General," he said, "your soldiers fight like

lions; you are all heroes. But, standing alone against the Republic, you will not always be victorious, and what then?"

"Then," answered Cathelineau, "then—we shall die." The words were to be fulfilled.

The main body of the army left Saumur on June 17. Before it did so it had received several accessions of value. Piron, who had been fighting in Brittany, d'Autichamp, hitherto remaining quietly at Angers, as well as several enforced republican recruits, came to give in their adherence to the royalist cause. Above all, the young Prince Philippe de Talmont, son of the Duc de la Trémoille and owner of vast possessions in the western provinces, arrived to offer his services. Already involved in earlier conspiracies, he had emigrated on their failure and had fought with the *emigrés* under the Princes in their first campaign. When Louis XVI was executed, he had been in the Place de la Révolution, hoping in vain for a popular demonstration which might have saved the King; returning when all was over to the west, where he had been arrested and imprisoned. Saved from impending death by the intrigues of his brother, the Abbé de la Trémoille, who had bribed a member of the Convention to contrive his escape, Talmont proceeded to Saumur, where he was received with enthusiasm. Handsome, young, brave, attractive, belonging to their own locality and noblesse, he was well adapted to appeal to the peasants; and young Forestier, the boy of seventeen who had been brought to Clisson by La Rochejacquelein, hastened to resign in his favour the post to which he had been newly appointed, of general of the cavalry. The son of a shoemaker, and studying for the priesthood when the call to arms

had come, the lad had been given his high position in the army on the death of Dommaigné ; but having refused, with rare modesty to assume the title of general, he cheerfully yielded his post to Talmont and served under him as second in command.[1]

It was desirable that Saumur, connecting both sides of the Loire, should continue in the hands of the royalists, and a garrison was to be left there, under the command of the reluctant La Rochejacquelein, relegated for the moment to the rear. Angers was to be occupied on the way to Nantes.

Before leaving the town a proclamation was issued intended to check a disposition to pillage which seems to have manifested itself. Horror was expressed at the infamous conduct of certain soldiers, as well as at the perfidy of some inhabitants of the town who had themselves incited to robbery. Should anything of the sort occur again, a flogging was to be the punishment of a first offence, and death of a repetition of it, the like chastisement to be dealt out to any person who connived at such deeds. Nothing was to be bought from a soldier, and should any man be suspected of producing pillaged articles, he was to be denounced to the authorities.[2]

Meantime the soldiers were showing an increasing inclination to succumb to one of their periodical attacks of home-sickness. It had been thought well to promise, for the first time, pay and rations to the

[1] According to Grille, it was at Angers that Talmont, who had been in confinement there, joined the Grande Armée.—*La Vendée en* 1793.

[2] The republican municipal authorities in many of the towns were also vigorous in their denunciation of pillage, extensively carried on by the troops.

men left at Saumur, to ensure their continuing at their post; and the absence of enthusiasm when it became a question of marching on Nantes led Stofflet to issue a proclamation stigmatising those who should stay behind as cowards—a step which, whilst it augmented the numbers of the main body of the army, had the effect of decreasing the strength of the garrison at Saumur.

The terror caused by the victorious troops cleared the way before them. Angers was evacuated before it was reached, its means of defence being quite insufficient. "The troops you send us," wrote a resident in the town to a friend in Paris, "sell their arms. They are given guns in Paris which will be of service only to the brigands. They sell munitions, clothes, even their bread." [1]

The awe inspired by the royalists is shown by an adventure of four reckless young men during the stay of the Vendeans at Angers.

Wholly unsupported, they rode to La Flêche, ten leagues from the town, entered it shouting "*Vive le Roi!*" and, repairing to the municipality, announced to the terrified officials that the royalist army was on its way to Paris, and that, at the head of a body of 2,000 cavalry, they had been sent on to demand quarters at La Flêche. Their escort, they added, had been left half a league distant from the town, lest the citizens should be alarmed. The story was implicitly believed; the scarves of the republican officials were meekly surrendered; the tricolour cockade was trampled upon; the tree of liberty burnt. Having performed these exploits, the young men were dining quietly at the inn when a maid-servant

[1] *La Vendée en* 1793, Fr. Grille.

warned them that the truth was suspected, that there was talk of their arrest; and, mounting their horses, they galloped gaily back to Angers, decked with tricolour cockades, and reported their doings at head quarters.

A singular scene was enacted during the days passed by the army at Angers when the pretended Bishop of Agra rode into the cathedral town, "with the simplicity of an Apostle," followed by a servant bearing his wooden cross, and after officiating with episcopal dignity, obtained the pardon of a couple of republican gunners condemned to death for some crime.

At this juncture the important step was taken of inviting Charette, whose campaign in Lower Vendée had hitherto been conducted in perfect independence of the operations of the Grande Armée, to act in concert with it.

The war carried on by him had been attended with varying success, and he had suffered not a few reverses; but the brilliant victory by which Machecoul had been recaptured had now taken place, and Lescure, recovering from his wound at La Boulaye, and with leisure to review the situation, had written to present his congratulations to the victor, and had expressed his wish that a combination of the two armies could be effected. Charette, in reply, had complimented the Grande Armée upon its successes, culminating in the battle at Saumur, and had reciprocated Lescure's desire for concerted action. Donnissan was in consequence dispatched, with the approval of the other leaders, to open negotiations with Charette, to offer him the cannon and ammunition of which he stood in need, and to arrange that he should join in the projected attack on Nantes.

Nantes may have seemed a doomed city. It had been for some time in a precarious condition by reason of the insurgents by whom it was surrounded, as well as through internal dissensions. Two republican parties existed in the town, and the Gironde and the Mountain each possessed their adherents. Outside its walls, royalist conspiracies and revolts were keeping Brittany disturbed, and a revolutionary tribunal, established in the town, was busily plying its trade, executions frequently taking place.

Besides all this, the city itself counted not a few supporters of the royalist cause; and whilst every effort was being made to prepare for its defence, whilst General Canclaux and General Beysser were indefatigable in their endeavour to produce order out of disorder, and the municipal authorities were no less energetic, many must have looked on with a secret hope that their labour might prove vain. Of Nantes, as of Saumur, it might have been said, in the words of a recent writer, that "*un vent de trahison soufflait sur la ville.*" The Vendeans were made acquainted with what took place in the town, and women especially are said to have gone to and fro, carrying the news of it to the royalist camp. It was a condition of affairs leading every man to look with suspicion on his neighbour, and calculated to paralyse effort. The very kind of resistance suggested in some quarters points to something akin to desperation.

"Send us a good chemist," wrote Santerre and his friends to Paris. "By mines, by fumigations, and other means, the enemy's army might be destroyed, put to sleep, asphyxiated."

Yet Nantes had braced itself to resist. It had certain elements of strength, not a little courage, if

somewhat of the nature of the courage of despair, and a genuine enthusiasm for the principles of the revolution. Beysser, commanding the Red Dragoons, a man of low reputation but of unflinching valour, who laughed and drank and was confident of success, was popular. Coustard, the same who had fought and been defeated at Saumur, had come to Nantes, to renew the struggle and wipe out if possible the recollection of his failure. To the fact that he was a Girondist is attributed by Michelet a part of his determination to conquer at last. Had Nantes been abandoned, the charges of treachery freely launched at his party, strong in the city, might have been confirmed. "Nantes saved, on the other hand, the Gironde, at least in the eyes of history, was likewise saved."

The mayor, Baco, another Girondist, was vigorous and violent, scorning the idea of surrender. When the insurrection first broke out he would have wished to raise an army and send it to fight for the Republic. He had been over-ruled by more timid counsels; Nantes, it was thought, might have enough to do to take care of itself. Now that June was come, it seemed that even this would be a hard task. It was nevertheless to be attempted. No party differences were to be permitted to weaken the city. At bitter war elsewhere, at Nantes the Gironde and the Mountain were to sign a truce; and, reconciled by a danger shared in common, they met in the cathedral and pledged themselves to save France.

Would it be saved? None could tell. The Vendeans were strong, strong with a strength it was difficult to measure, strong in numbers, more strong by reason of past victories, strong in the enthusiasm rendering them indifferent to death.

Yet, had their enemies known it, the Vendean army was no longer what it had been when, so short a time ago, it had rushed to the attack of Saumur with an eagerness outrunning even that of the chiefs who led the way. Victory, instead of spurring the peasants on to fresh efforts, had rendered them satisfied with what had been accomplished and unwilling to attempt more. At Saumur the men left with La Rochejacquelein in charge of the town dispersed to their homes, leaving him almost alone; and at Angers the main body of the troops had melted away till scarcely more than 12,000 men remained. The fatal delusion that their object was finally achieved was working in the minds of the peasants, and they were asking to what purpose they should continue the struggle.

This being the condition of the army, it has been said that the Vendean leaders would have done more wisely had they changed their purpose and refrained from so arduous an enterprise as the capture of Nantes. That Bonchamps, against whose judgment it had been undertaken, was not blind to the uncertainty of the result is clear from a letter he addressed to two friends who appear to have meditated throwing in their lot with the Grande Armée.

"Do not hasten to come," he warned them; "nothing yet is decided—all depends upon the capture of Nantes. I have been swept away by the torrent. You, more fortunate, are still on the shore. Remain there till Nantes is in our power. If we fail, you would be rushing on certain and useless ruin. Preserve yourselves for our dear France, which you may be able to serve when I am no more." [1]

He was, however, straining every nerve to render

[1] *Histoire de la Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

the course he had not approved a success. Crossing the Loire he made his way up the right bank of the river, occupying in turn the small towns on his way and enlisting several thousands of new recruits as he moved on to rejoin the main body of the army before Nantes.

From Angers the Vendean chiefs had sent their summons to the city to surrender, in a document addressed to the mayor and the municipal officers of the town. Prepared for peace, as also prepared for war, they held in one hand the avenging sword, in the other the olive-branch; and they named their conditions. Within six hours after the letter was received, the white flag must be raised, the garrison lay down arms, and the public treasure, weapons, and ammunition be deposited in their hands. In this case the garrison would be permitted to leave the town in safety, swearing fealty to religion and to the King, and no harm should befall the town. Should these terms be refused, Nantes, when in the hands of the royalists, would be given over to military execution, and soldiers would suffer death.

The missive was duly delivered, and Baco, the mayor, made answer to the men who had presented it.

"Here is my reply to the brigands," he said boldly. "Either we will all of us perish, or liberty shall triumph."

Yet he kept the matter as private as might be, lest trouble in town might ensue.

By the clubs of Nantes a despairing appeal was made to the neighbouring departments.

"Brothers and friends"—so it ran—"rise up, proud children of the ancient Armorica, rise in a mass. This is no time to deliberate. Your safety or your

ruin are here, within our walls. . . . Only by union can we arrest the invasion of the barbarians and assure the reign of liberty. Treachery is all around you, brothers. If you are told that imposing forces are coming to our defence, believe nothing of it; and set forth. If they speak to you of victories won over the rebels, of towns recaptured from them, believe nothing of it and hasten your departure. And should they say that Nantes desires to capitulate, or that it has already surrendered . . . ah brothers and friends, then above all hasten thither. Come, we are worthy of you; come, we will conquer together; or should you not be able to come in time, we will leave you an example to follow, and we shall know how to die. . . ."

Horrors might afterwards disgrace the name of Nantes—horrors perpetrated by the men sent from Paris; horrors might even now be taking place, for cruelty and fear go hand in hand. But at this moment, the moment of her weakness and her extremity of danger, Nantes was heroic.

Though the numbers of the opposed parties are variously stated, the royalist armies cannot by this time have counted less than 50,000. Charette had responded with alacrity and cordiality to the invitation to take part in the siege, busying himself in gathering together troops for the occasion, and it had been arranged that on St. Peter's Day, June 29—a date fixed with the intention of stimulating the religious ardour of the Vendean soldiers—he was to take up his position opposite the town on the southern bank of the Loire, to occupy the suburbs, and if possible to gain possession of the islands between him and the city, whilst the Grande Armée, supported

by his artillery, would deal from the right bank of the river with the town itself. It will thus be seen that the part assigned him was rather, as his biographer[1] observes, a demonstration than a share in the actual attack.

His tryst was punctually kept. At 2.30 on the night named, he was at his post and had opened fire—a fire more noisy than effective—upon the town, wondering the while that no sound of an attack was audible from the right bank of the river. The explanation was that at the very outset of the enterprise upon which so much depended, the preconcerted plans of the Grande Armée had been thrown out. At Nort, seized on the way to Nantes, so gallant a defence was made by the small garrison whose very presence was due to an oversight on the part of Canclaux, that it was considerably later than had been anticipated when the army reached the city.

Within the city all was prepared for resistance. Beysser had been named provisionally commandant of the town and castle, and had affixed to the walls a proclamation couched in the emotional language of the day. "Yes, men of Nantes"—so it ran—"with you I will live, or with you I will die. Frenchmen can no longer exist otherwise than free. With the help of good citizens I believe I can answer for the safety of the town. But if, through treason or some fatality, it should fall into the hands of the enemy, I swear that it shall become their sepulchre and our own, that we will bury them with us under its ruins, and will show the world the great and terrible example of what hatred of tyranny and love of liberty can do for a people."

[1] M. Bittard des Portes.

The administrative body, the National Guard and the popular Society, gathered together in the cathedral, likewise vowed to bury themselves beneath the ruins of their city rather than yield it up to the insurgents.[1]

Tidings of Charette's approach had reached it on the evening of June 28. Fires, like rockets or lighted balloons, had been observed in the distance—the camp fires lit by the troops bivouacking on the heights —and sounds like the roaring of bulls were heard, due to the fact that, being short of drums, the royalists were accustomed to make use of horns to summon the several contingents to their posts. When, in the darkness of the night, the cannonade began, the Marseillaise hymn was the answer of the town to the guns directed upon it by the royalist leaders.

Now that the critical moment was at hand, opinions were divided as to the course to be pursued. The two members of the Convention present in the city, Gillet and Merlin, together with General Bonvoust, were in favour of evacuation. They were over-ruled. Baco had pledged his word that the town would not surrender. Canclaux, chief in command, Beysser, and others of the officers, sided with him, and it was determined that the trial of strength should take place.

Owing to the delay at Nort, Charette's bombardment had been going on for some five hours before, at seven or eight in the morning, the attack from the north began. Soon the battle was raging. Almost at its beginning, Fleuriot, the royalist general—one of two brothers of the name—was shot; Mesnard was mortally wounded; and Talmont, who, disregarding

[1] *Histoire de la Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

the prudent remonstrances of the boy Forestier, had thrown himself and his cavalry with rash precipitation upon the faubourg of Marchix, had been wounded, though not so severely as to disable him. Baco was everywhere where the peril was greatest, encouraging and stimulating the courage of the besieged. Shot in the thigh, "It is a triumphal car," he cried from the barrel on which they had placed him, "that every man should envy me." Coustard, the Girondist, was fighting fiercely. Yet at one time it seemed that all would be in vain, and that Nantes, like Fontenay and Saumur, was doomed to fall into the hands of the enemy. Suddenly the fortunes of the day were changed.

For an error in tactics the newcomer, Talmont, was responsible. Cathelineau, with the experience won by three months of fighting, had wisely directed that the road to Guérande should be left open; so that fugitives should find no impediment in their way. Whether forgetful of this order, or misunderstanding it, the Prince barred the path, setting up two pieces of cannon to drive the flying soldiers back into the combat and leaving them no alternative save to fight for their lives. It was a fatal error, and the consequences were serious.

If the issue of the battle was uncertain, it still seemed as if the royalists might win the day. Everywhere they were forcing their way into the town and compelling its defenders to fall back; when, rallying the remains of the 109th Regiment of the line—already, after a gallant struggle, put to flight—Beysser once more charged the enemy. He was confronted by Cathelineau. Two horses had been killed under the commander-in-chief; he was

now fighting on foot, surrounded by the peasants from his own village, many of them of his kin, and had flung himself upon the Blues, when an artisan, firing from a window and recognising the Vendean leader, took aim at him. The ball, breaking his arm on its way, struck him in the breast, and he fell, as it was to prove, mortally wounded.

That shot decided the fortunes of the day. As the news spread that Cathelineau, the idol of the peasants, and hitherto apparently invulnerable, was wounded—perhaps even dead—terror and dismay laid hold of them; a general panic took place, and they fled. Nantes was saved.

In the carriage to which they bore him "the saint of Anjou" lay, hope lingering in the hearts of the men who loved him. If he was wounded, wounds can be healed. But his last battle had been fought. Gangrene set in, and by July 14 he had passed away, the army dispersing to their homes to mourn him.

In Nantes the republican deliverance was celebrated on the night of the battle by illuminations and feasting. Along the length of the quay, with the Loire running below, tables were spread, and, though armed and alert, soldiers and civilians shared the banquet, "drinking to the Republic, to the conclusion of the civil war, and to the death of La Vendée."

And still, on the other side of the river, Charette kept his post. Throughout the day he had loyally attempted to perform the work agreed upon. His cannonade had been continued, though rather availing to waste powder and shot than to do damage to the enemy; he had more than once pushed his men forward, only to be driven back by the fire from the town. At half-past two in the afternoon the slackening of fire

on the right bank gave him the only intimation he received that the attack was a failure. In the stress and strain of their defeat Charette had been overlooked by the chiefs of the Grande Armée; nor was it till nightfall that tidings reached him, through his own comrade, Lyrot, of Cathelineau's death and the retreat of his allies. Lyrot himself, with the troops under his command, was retiring at once.

Charette, by whatever reasons he may have been determined, lingered on. It may be, as M. Bittard des Portes suggests, that a man who loved fighting could not persuade himself to forego it. Till the following night he remained in the position he had taken up, and before leaving, a strange scene was witnessed on the left bank of the Loire. In contrast to the mournful retreat of the Grande Armée, carrying with it its dying chief, a fête had been organised, and dancing was going on as if at a festival. The sounds of music and singing, mingled with shouts of "*Vive Louis XVII! vive Charette!*" reached the town across the river. Then the wounded were placed upon wagons, oxen were harnessed to the artillery and guns, and with a final salvo of cannon to announce their departure to the enemy, the "gay bandits" withdrew from the siege and took their way undisturbed towards Légé.

CHAPTER X

JUNE—JULY

Biron's position—Westermann's successes—And defeat—Châtillon captured—Biron's fate—Rossignol and Ronsin—Battle at Vihiers—Royalist blunders—Divided authority—D'Elbée made commander-in-chief—Various estimates of him—Re-arrangement of the royalist forces.

BIRON, now commander-in-chief of the army of the Côtes de la Rochelle, had taken no part in the defence of Nantes. From the moment he assumed the command, he had formed his own conception of the course to be pursued, and had refused to be turned from it in spite of the pressure brought to bear upon him by the crowd of advisers, military and civil, who forced upon him counsel and admonition. Though Tours, with the group of generals of whom it was the head quarters, its representatives of the people, and its council, was clamouring for his presence, he had steadily declined to go thither. In his opinion, to reopen communications between Nantes and La Rochelle was of paramount importance, and to the appeals from Tours he replied on June 26, three days before the siege of Nantes, that his views remained unchanged, and that, in his belief, it would be to betray the interests of the Republic were he to neglect the defence of the coast and place La Rochelle and Rochefort in jeopardy. Whilst authorising Tours to send what troops could be spared to Nantes, and himself consenting in return to detach 3,000 men for the protection of Tours, he would do no more.

The fact was that Biron was in a difficult, if not impossible, position, and his relations alike with his subordinates in the west and with the central authorities in Paris were strained to the breaking-point. Tours had gone so far as to attempt independent action ; and though he was for the moment supported by the Government, its treatment of his predecessors warned him how little he could count upon such support. His very generals were inclined to ignore his supremacy. He was likewise out of sympathy with the methods of some of these last, notably with those employed by Westermann, who was to play so prominent and deadly a part in the history of the Grande Armée, and at this time first appears prominently upon the scene. Brave, fierce, ruthless, foolhardy and vainglorious, now attaining success by daring insubordination, now compromising a situation by the craving to win personal renown at the expense of prudence, Westermann had been carrying fire and sword through La Vendée during the latter end of June. In issuing a proclamation to the effect that all villages supplying contingents of men or other support to the rebels would be burnt and pillaged, he explained that " this terrible example " was necessary to arrest a flood by which the Republic would be destroyed. Biron disapproved the menace ; but Westermann, no more than the representatives on mission in the west, sharing the authority of the military chiefs, was disposed to defer to the opinion of the commander-in-chief.

This being the condition of affairs Biron was pressing for his recall. Refused the supplies and reinforcements he judged necessary for conducting a campaign with success, refused also the services of

officers he could trust, in command of an army in a scandalous state of disorganisation, he was eager to be permitted to resign.

"If," he wrote on June 23, "all that is distasteful and disagreeable to me was merely a personal matter, I would endure it uncomplainingly with truly republican patience." But in justice to the interests of the Republic it was his duty to protest. He therefore demanded either to be given a chief, to be employed in another army, or to be relieved of a responsibility it was neither just nor possible that he should bear any longer.

Meantime Westermann was enjoying a series of triumphs. The main body of the Vendean army being engaged on the expedition against Nantes, Saumur deserted by its garrison, Châtillon left almost defenceless, he had seized the opportunity and made the most of it. Parthenay—to which Lescure, still suffering from his wound, had hurried—was first attacked with complete success, Lescure effecting his escape with difficulty. The village of Amailloux was then pillaged and burnt, whether in pursuance of the policy already announced, or, more excusably, in retaliation for the treatment Parthenay had received at the hands of the royalists. It was at this time, writes Savary,[1] that the atrocities called reprisals began. At Parthenay, republican in sympathy, nothing, according to Westermann, had been left by the royalists save eyes to weep with; and Amailloux was made to pay the penalty, the booty secured there being dispatched to Parthenay. Lescure's own château at Clisson was destroyed, as well as La Rochejacquelein's ancient castle of Durbellière.

Châtillon was next captured. Westermann was

[1] *Guerres des Vendéens et des Chouans*, Savary.

everywhere triumphant. It was no wonder. The failure at Nantes had taken place; Cathelineau was dead; and, dispirited and out of heart, the Grande Armée had temporarily disbanded. All that Lescure and La Rochejacquelein could do was to gather together some 3,000 men, who again met the Blues and were again defeated.

Westermann, however, was by no means confident, in default of reinforcements, of maintaining his position. The difficulty of estimating the strength of the forces arrayed against him is shown by an incident related by Beauvais. A comparatively newcomer, the latter, left at Bressuire in charge of eight pieces of artillery, expressed his surprise to La Rochejacquelein at the inadequacy of the number of men under his command. La Rochejacquelein, better acquainted with the resources of the country, laughed. The bells, he said, were ringing in certain parishes, and before midday on the morrow Beauvais would have as many thousands of men as he had guns to guard. La Rochejacquelein proved right. The next morning 10,000 peasants were in the town.[1]

Encamped between Mortagne and Châtillon, in the heart of the enemy's territory, it was no wonder that Westermann felt ill at ease, and wrote to Biron to demand reinforcements and to beg that Biron himself would march upon the rebels and prevent them from falling upon him in force. According to the general-in-chief's instructions, he added, he had had a Te Deum sung at Châtillon by constitutional priests; but the ceremony had taken no great effect. "Our people want no monkey-tricks, and the people of the place hold the *intrus* in horror."

[1] *Mémoires*, Poirier de Beauvais.

At the very time that the republican victories were being celebrated at Châtillon, Lescure and La Rochejacquelein, now joined by d'Elbée, Bonchamps, and Stofflet, were planning a counter-stroke, destined to prove entirely successful; and Westermann's fears were to be realised.

In spite of his misgivings, he was keeping characteristically careless guard; and the sound of cannon was his first intimation of the presence of royalist troops. Surprising the Blues by creeping upon them unawares under cover of the standing wheat, the peasants killed the gunners and gained possession of the guns. When Westermann reached the battlefield it was to find his men flying; his troops were surrounded, his infantry practically cut to pieces, and with his cavalry, he was forced to fly to Bressuire, attacked as he galloped through the villages by the peasants he encountered, even women throwing themselves forward in the attempt to stop the horses by clutching at the reins. "Never," says Mercier du Rocher, administrator of La Vendée, "was a rout more complete. Westermann, in tears, asked himself what had become of the fine legion with which he had often fought Prussians and Austrians." [1]

The road to Châtillon had been left open to the victors. When the town was reached a scene of carnage took place. At the memory of their recent reverses, of comrades massacred, homes burnt and laid waste, the peasants broke loose from the restraint exercised over them by their leaders, and fell upon their prisoners, fiercely declaring—Bernard de Marigny at their head—that no quarter should be given.

[1] *La Vendée Patriote*, Chassin.

Informed of what was going on, Lescure, who, in pursuit of the flying republicans, had left behind him 300 captives, hurried to the scene of the massacre, the unhappy victims who remained alive clinging to him for safety and protection as he interposed between them and the soldiers bent upon putting them to death. Marigny fiercely protested.

"Go," he told Lescure, "and leave me to kill these monsters. They have burnt your château."

The argument was not well chosen. Should the slaughter not cease it would be against Marigny that he would defend the prisoners, so Lescure replied. "You are too cruel, Marigny," he added. "You will die by the sword."

For the moment his authority triumphed and the men he had taken under his protection escaped; but in the farms around many fugitives met their deaths. The fruit of Westermann's policy of fire and sword, the ferocity shown by the peasants marks a new feature, so far as Upper Vendée was concerned, in the conduct of the war.

Westermann's defeat was acknowledged on all hands. It remained, after the fashion of a time when failure was a crime, to apportion the guilt and to decide whether the unfortunate general was to be added to the number of officers awaiting trial and chastisement. The representatives Goupilleau and Bourdon, on a mission in the west, wrote to announce the disaster to the authorities in Paris, adding that it was difficult to believe that a man who knew his business could have permitted himself to be thus surprised—a covert charge of either incompetence or treachery to which the Convention responded by summoning Westermann to appear at

the bar to answer for his conduct. The latter, for his part, had already shifted the responsibility on to the shoulders of his colonel of infantry, a former friend of Lescure and La Rochejacquelein, whom he accused of treachery, sending him in irons to Niort.

In the end Westermann was acquitted of blame, was permitted to resume his command, and a tribute was paid to his methods, his abilities, and—strange to say—to the humane principles he had displayed.

Charges and recriminations, nevertheless, continued to abound. The representatives in the west distrusted the generals; one general distrusted another. Rossignol, colonel of the Chasseurs, having openly connived at insubordination, had been arrested some weeks earlier; but, having friends in Paris, was released, with a reproof to those responsible for his treatment. All was confusion. Biron, ill and suffering from fever, continued to press for his recall. On July 12 it was sent him in the form of a mandate to repair forthwith to Paris and there to explain his conduct. A week later he was heard in his defence and was committed to the Abbaye prison, where he was left, in failing health, until December 31, when he was condemned to death, "proved to have joined in a conspiracy against the safety, external and internal, of the Republic."

His crime was doubtless his failure, together with the fact that he was a noble. Old blood and an ancient name were dangerous possessions. The surmise that they contributed to his disgrace is corroborated by the fact that Rossignol—"a *sans culotte* general"—was selected as his successor, the man who had done his best to foment a spirit of insubordination amongst the troops, but whose appointment

showed, to quote his friend, General Turreau, "that neutrality was no longer allowed—that patriotism could not compound with aristocracy."[1]

It is fair to observe that Biron's end went far to justify the distrust that had been felt for him. The treatment he had received may explain—it does not excuse—the recantation of a principle. He had been a servant of the Republic, not of the men by whom the Republic was degraded and debased; yet he died an apostate from the creed he had embraced.

"I have been faithless to my God, my order, my King," he told the bystanders. "I die full of faith and of repentance."

The words suggest the inquiry whether there was no other matter calling for repentance in the Duke's career. Had his late masters after all just cause of complaint? Had he been, if not disloyal, half-hearted in the service he had rendered them? It is a question that must remain unanswered.

His successor, Rossignol, was a man of a very different stamp. His claims to the favour of the government can be briefly stated. A jeweller's apprentice, he had joined in the attack upon the Bastille, had then been accorded the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and had since served on Biron's staff, with other officers of the same nature, always in opposition to their chief. With no talents, and destitute of the necessary military experience, he owed his promotion to his friendship with Ronsin, an unsuccessful playwright highly esteemed by the Parisian authorities. It was to the dismay of all competent judges that these two men were now practically associated in the command of the armies of the west. "With generals such as

[1] *Mémoires*, Turreau.

Rossignol and Ronsin," wrote one representative in those districts, "can any good work be done? I believe it is wished that the war should be prolonged."

What was felt by soldiers can be judged by a letter from Talot, adjutant-general, to the representative Choudieu. Of Ronsin, associated with Rossignol in the command, he wrote, with contemptuous dislike, as a boaster and a spy. "What," he asked, "are these *adjoints* of the Minister of War? Are they generals? Are they Ministers—amphibious beings, with two mouths, two pockets, and not two swords?" Grammont, a comedian who had played in Ronsin's pieces, was made adjutant-general "of the same rank as I—*merci*." As to the general-in-chief, "I have just heard that poor Rossignol—made general of brigade, July 12, general of division, July 15, is now, on July 27, named general-in-chief of the armies of the Côtes de la Rochelle. *Bone Deus!*"[1]

Ronsin's military record was to be even more singular. Having never so much as carried arms, he had been made captain (in June 1792), *chef d'escadron* (July 2), chief of brigade (July 3), general (July 4), and general of division (in October), without having witnessed a single battle. The spirit he brought to the performance of his duties in the west may be gathered from a letter dated August 1. Explaining that Rossignol had accepted the command on condition that Ronsin continued at hand for the purpose of directing operations, he congratulated his correspondent—one Vincent—on having compassed the ruin of Custine. "I, for my part," he added, "have contributed a little to Biron's fall. Do you complete,

[1] *La Vendée en* 1793, Fr. Grille.

in regard to Beauharnais and all nobles, a proscription so necessary to the maintenance of the Republic."

Such were the two men placed at the head of the army of the Côtes de la Rochelle.

It is unnecessary to pursue in detail the course of the war at this juncture—to describe fights where fortune inclined now to the one side, now to the other, of which the results were of no great moment, and were without any important effect upon the general situation.

Here and there incidents stand out giving life to the scene and serving to mark the characteristics and tendencies of the different leaders of a struggle where personality played so important a part. Now it is Bernard de Marigny, in command of the artillery—the same who would have massacred the prisoners at Châtillon—Marigny, fierce, impetuous, brave, who, having by an unauthorised movement contributed to a defeat, would have slain himself in his passionate remorse, had not Lescure and La Rochejacquelein comforted him. Again, there is the hurried consultation of the officers in charge of a detachment of royalists, separated for the moment from their chiefs, as to whether or not to attack the republican troops under Santerre at Vihiers.

"But," it was objected when the plan was mooted, "the generals are absent."

"So much the worse for them," was the reply of the boy Forestier. "They have days enough when they can conquer—let them leave this one to us."

"But the soldiers," urged some one with more prudence, "what will they say when they see none of the chiefs leading them?"

"Let them think that they are present," answered Piron, another officer—"that will be enough."

The battle was fought—fought with gallantry on either side, none but Santerre failing in courage. He may have had special reason for fear. The peasants knew that it was he who had presided at the execution of the King, and had vowed to take vengeance.

Not till the battle was over and won did Lescure and La Rochejacquelein arrive, meeting the peasants with their captured cannon. To Lescure's questions, they answered with another:

"What, General, you were not at the fight? Then it must have been M. Henri who commanded us."

The deception had been well carried out.

To turn for a moment from the course of the struggle to the means used to organise it, the reflection is forced upon the student that the penalties exacted from inexperience are heavy, more especially in the case of a war, like that of La Vendée, without precedent to act as a guide.

In the anxiety felt by most of the chiefs to avoid anything bearing the semblance of a military dictatorship they had fallen into an opposite error. From the central Council established at Châtillon the military element was almost absent; it was mainly composed of civilians, of whom the greater part belonged to the legal profession.

A dictatorship, in spite of the evils attaching to it, might nevertheless have gone far to save the situation. Had one of the emigrant princes had the courage and the spirit to offer himself as the head of the royalist insurgents in Upper and Lower Vendée, if it is unlikely that the ultimate triumph of principles of

reaction would have been secured, it would undeniably have afforded them their best chance. But it was not an adventure commending itself to the decadent Bourbons, and what chance it might have given their cause was lost. "A Prince was always lacking at the head of the royalist cause," observed Napoleon, seeking the reason of its failure. The men who were freely giving their blood and their lives, says a French writer, "called for their King, and God alone responded to their appeal. . . . None were absent save the Prince, who, after God, was the object of so much love and devotion." [1]

At the present moment the authority was divided between the heterogeneous Council sitting at Châtillon and the chiefs of the army, often scattered over different parts of the revolted provinces, where little facility of communication existed, and where it was often essential to act promptly, taking such measures as might suggest themselves on the spur of the moment. Time for deliberation was scanty, and the advice or directions of the Council might easily become obsolete before reaching the camp.

Besides all this, the Council had committed serious blunders. Ready money being hard to procure and the need of it urgent, a decree had been inopportunely passed declaring only those assignats negotiable when the royal device showed them to have been in circulation in pre-revolutionary times; and when it became clear that this method could not be made to work, and Bernier proposed, not only the use of the national and republican assignats, but the fabrication of fresh ones, the Council, with a creditable dislike to the production of what was in effect false coinage, took

[1] *Gellusseau Amaury*, quoted by Deniau.

a middle course and decided that republican paper-money could be accepted as valid when countersigned by a Vendean offcial. A heavy responsibility was thus assumed by a body in no condition to bear it.

Another measure of the provisional government—that of annulling all sales of national or confiscated property—though natural enough under the circumstances—was practically ineffective; since, on the pacification, the new purchasers, mostly from other parts of the country, were confirmed in their possession of what they had acquired.

A more serious fault on the part of the administrative body was an edict decreeing that every one in La Vendée and all local authorities should be forced to take the royalist oath. Such a measure, in imitation of that of the Convention requiring the cry "*Vive la République!*" from all citizens, was merely to invite perjury and to offer a reward for lying. It was the loyal and the true on either side, and they only, who would suffer. For others an oath on compulsion more or less was a matter easily settled with their consciences. The decree—it was afterwards revoked—was doubtless, like other proceedings, of the nature of a reprisal. Stories were current of women shot down in consequence of a refusal to abjure their faith. It was told of a certain Mademoiselle Baudriau, that, taken prisoner by a detachment of Blues, the officer in command, struck by her singular beauty, had offered her safety and protection if she would return with him to Saumur.

"You shall be happy," he promised. "I will never forsake you. You have no father," he urged as she rejected his offer; "I will take his place, and

later on, should you come to love me, will make you my wife."

"I—the wife of a republican officer?" she said. "Never."

"Let her cry '*Vive la République*,' and go," said the soldiers who looked on at the scene, moved to admiration by her courage. But she again rejected the opportunity of escape, and fell, shot down where she stood.[1]

It was with stories such as these—true or false—in the air that the Vendeans passed their decree imposing on all men the royalist oath. It was a retaliation unworthy of them, and their recognition of the fact was expressed when the order was cancelled.

Whatever might be its merits, the Council was plainly a failure. In a letter to the military chiefs, dated July 12, from the Abbé Jagault, acting as its secretary, he stated his conviction that this was the case, gave his reasons, and suggested the drastic remedy of its abolition.

"There ought to be more officers amongst us," he wrote. "They would possibly shorten discussion. We never arrive at the end of it; and often, though without desiring to do so, we go against your decisions. We have amongst us honest but timid men, who will not recognise the fact that events sometimes require prompt and revolutionary methods of treatment. The best course is to put an end to the Council and to adopt military measures. We discuss, and you act; but in the long run the men who discuss might dominate the men of action, and in civil war this must be avoided or all will be lost. . . . Take your steps, therefore; or, better still, let [the Council] die quietly. . . ."

[1] *La Vendée Militaire*, Joly-Crétineau.

The churchman was right. It was a juncture when divided authority came near to being fatal.

To add to the difficulty of the situation, Cathelineau's death had left the insurgents without the semblance of a military head; and it was felt that one must be provided without delay. The choice was made on July 16, two days after the death of the commander-in-chief, and it fell upon d'Elbée. The election was ratified by all his colleagues, but without the cordiality marking that of his predecessor. In yielding the first place to Cathelineau, it had been given by his brothers-in-arms to a man of exceptional position, exceptional gifts, and, above all, exceptional influence. By d'Elbée's appointment they were presented, as commander-in-chief, with a comrade, with whom two or three of them might, had they been so minded, have competed for the post, inferior in rank to some of them, and whose abilities, though they might equal, did not greatly surpass their own. It is therefore possible that some amongst those who were to be his subordinates grudged him his post. There have been incontestably historians who have not hesitated to assert that it was by underhand means that the matter had been arranged. Of these last, Madame de La Rochejacquelein is foremost.[1] In giving an account of the election, she explains that Bonchamps, who, "in the opinion of all sensible people," should have been named for the post, was detained at Jallais by his wounds; that her husband, M. de Lescure, was ill and unfit for manœuvring —which indeed is probable; and that La Rochejacquelein gave the matter no thought. Had he done so, it is certain that the man who some months later

[1] *Mémoires.*

was to be appointed general-in-chief and was then so acutely and painfully conscious of his shortcomings, would have been the last to press his claims. Under these circumstances, Madame de La Rochejacquelein attributed the appointment of d'Elbée to intrigues and ambition on his part. The statement, uncorroborated by any evidence, may be dismissed as dictated by a woman's jealousy with regard to her personal friends. If M. Joly-Crétineau also asserts that the new generalissimo was a man of more virtue than talent, more courage than insight, against his verdict may be placed the testimony of General Turreau, at whose hands d'Elbée ultimately met his death.

According to the republican general, admitted to be an authority on military matters, the Vendean chief possessed all the character and abilities necessary in the leader of a party. "A consummate soldier," he pursues, "he formed the Vendeans to fight in the manner most in conformity with the nature of the locality and the genius of the people. . . . He knew how to give to the charge of his troops an action, an impulse so rapid that I may call it irresistible. . . . It was his system that caused him to gain twenty victories. His lieutenants were beaten every time that they departed from his principles."

The testimony of an expert and an opponent may be permitted to weigh against criticism from those jealous of the position d'Elbée had achieved.

M. Boutillier de Saint-André,[1] too, though a boy at the time of the war, retained a clear impression of his father's opinion of d'Elbée. "He was the one of the Vendean generals," he writes, "with whom my

[1] *Mémoires*, Boutillier de Saint-André.

father was most brought into personal relations, and I never perceived nor heard that he had intrigued to obtain his nomination to the highest position in the army. . . . All the wishes, all the votes, taken at a gathering of the chiefs of the armies, at Châtillon, were given to d'Elbée, who combined with brilliant courage every Christian virtue."

There is another observation to be made in this connection. If the royalist army had obtained unexpected successes, men who looked forward, and especially those who had lost the hopefulness of youth, found it hard to believe in its ultimate triumph. To quote M. Boutillier de Saint-André again: "MM. d'Elbée, de la Verrie, de Lescure, above all M. d'Elbée, thought with reason that it would take much to make their cause, however just and sacred, triumphant. The last, above all, full of faith and resignation, believed that truth and virtue have little to support them on earth, since it is heaven that is their true home. He had made the sacrifice of his life. He desired to die for religion and for the King, whom he had determined to defend but without hope of final success. I had these facts from my father, who had spent a week with this brave and pious general, coming away, though edified, filled with melancholy forebodings." [1]

Had such a man indeed coveted the chief command, it was as a man covets the post of most danger and difficulty. But there is no evidence to prove that it was coveted by d'Elbée. Poirier de Beauvais, who had joined the army at Saumur, expressly states that he was painfully conscious of his deficiencies, and would have been only too ready to

[1] *Mémoires*, Boutillier de Saint-André.

relinquish the commandership-in-chief. It was not a question of knowledge, he told Beauvais, when the latter would have dwelt upon his military science; it was necessary to command obedience, and that he could not do. With Bonchamps general-in-chief, all would have gone well. It was because his firmness was known that he had not been elected to fill the post.[1]

The sequel goes far to prove that d'Elbée's misgivings, if they are correctly reported by his friend, were justified. Upright, honest, brave, and single-minded, he proved unequal to the task of enforcing his authority. Whether another man would have been more successful remains doubtful.

If his election was, under the circumstances, the best that could be made, a serious blunder was committed at this time with regard to Charette, whose cordial co-operation, could it have been obtained, would have been of great importance to the leaders of the Grande Armée.

In the rearrangement of the royalist forces consequent upon the death of Cathelineau, it had been determined that four generals of division should be appointed, each being entrusted with the selection of another, to act as his subordinate. To Lescure the district of Poitou was assigned; to Royrand, Central Vendée, where his operations had been chiefly carried on; to Bonchamps, Anjou; and to Donnissan, Lower Poitou, the part of the country virtually under the command of Charette.

Donnissan, formerly holding the rank of field-marshal, was a native of Gascony and a stranger to La Vendée, where considerations of birth and race held a place of so much moment. His would therefore have

[1] *Mémoires*, Poirier de Beauvais.

been in any case an unwise appointment. To place a man unconnected with the province in nominal command of a district in which he was personally unknown and where Charette reigned supreme, was an error almost incredible in men genuinely devoted to their cause. If the most prominent leader of Lower Vendée could not reasonably aspire to be named commander-in-chief, he had every right to anticipate that the command he unofficially held in Lower Poitou would be officially confirmed, and the omission of what would have been at least an act of courtesy and a recognition of his services could not be expected to promote cordiality on his part. The blunder was accentuated rather than the reverse when M. de Donnissan named him as his second in command, in the apparent expectation that a man who had so far exercised independent authority would be content for the future to act under orders. It can be no matter of surprise that Charette virtually ignored the arrangement.

"He was evidently satisfied neither with the new organisation nor with the post they wished to give him. . . . He affected, whilst returning thanks for it, not to take M. de Donnissan's nomination seriously." [1]

The opportunity of effecting a real union between the forces of Lower Vendée and the Grande Armée was by these means lost.

[1] *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, Bittard des Portes.

CHAPTER XI

JULY

Party strife—Death of Sapinaud—Republican heroism—Policy of destruction—The army of Mayence—Kleber—Tinténiac's mission—Negotiations with England.

ALL through those hot July days—the last summer that so many of the combatants were to see—the war went on with varying success, heroic, sanguinary, inconclusive. Sometimes the rebels won the day; again, the Blues would be triumphant. What would be the end? No one knew. The attention Paris could spare from its own affairs and from the attempts of the Girondists to raise a party in the provinces strong enough to subvert the government, was centred upon the rebellion, now coming to be considered a menace to the Republic itself.

The situation was complicated at the seat of war by party strife. At Nantes the Gironde and the Mountain, reconciled for the moment under the stress of a common danger, were again at each other's throats. The Legion of Nantes—Girondist in its principles—and the battalions under the command of Meuris, the tinsmith who had contributed to the deliverance of the city by detaining the Grande Armée at Nort on its way thither, hated one another—a hatred embittered still further when, in a duel with an officer belonging to the Legion, Meuris lost his life. Baco, the mayor, the wound he had received at the siege still unhealed, carried in person what

was equivalent to a defiance to the bar of the Convention, in the shape of an address containing the hope that that assembly "would shortly place the government in more fortunate hands, so that it might no longer be possible to despair of the safety of the country."

A tumult ensued. Baco, stung to fury by a charge of Vendean sympathies, gave the lie to the speaker; and was thrown into prison. Beysser, the Girondist general, was suspended from his functions on a charge of federalism; and, accused by the representatives of the Convention in the west of high treason, placarded the walls of Nantes with his vehement justification:

"Citizens, he whom you loved to call your general has been declared traitor to the country. These are his crimes: He saved Nantes, which the brigands of the Mountain would have yielded up to their accomplices, the brigands of La Vendée; he recognised the sovereignty of the people, which the disciples of Marat would destroy"—so it ran with much more in the same strain. Through the mediation of Canclaux, Beysser was practically acquitted and restored to some species of command; but it was not likely that the language he had used with regard to the men in power would be forgotten or forgiven. His doom was no more than deferred, and his career found its close, like that of so many of his brothers-in-arms, upon the scaffold.

Meantime the war continued, now dying temporarily down, now bursting forth again into fiercer flame. The Republic was rallying its forces. Philipeaux, the Dantonist, was travelling through the west on a mission of what Michelet calls "*mendacité sublime*," begging, imploring, entreating the cities

and departments he visited to supply troops to the government in its hour of peril, and enable it to grapple with its domestic foes. And still the issue of the struggle was uncertain.

In one of the fights almost of daily occurrence, M. de Sapinaud's presentiment of coming death found its fulfilment. Fallen wounded into the hands of a body of republicans under the command of General Tuncq, he was cut to pieces by his captors, the confession of his faith upon his lips.

"I die happy," he said, "since I die for my King."

To save his body from indignity four peasants belonging to his estate risked and lost their lives. The campaign upon which he had entered with open eyes and a prediction of failure had, for him, lasted scarcely more than four months.

A melancholy man, with the sense of doom hanging over him, he was in no wise equipped with the sanguine spirit befitting the leader of a forlorn hope. He had done his duty well and gallantly, but without the joyous enthusiasm of a La Rochejacquelein, or the love of fighting and adventure of a Charette.

"You are wrong, *mon ami*," he once said to M. de Royrand, who had congratulated him after a battle upon his conspicuous courage in confronting death, "I fear it more than any one. But I should be sorry that others showed themselves braver than I in danger." [1]

To such a man, face to face daily with what he feared, the end may well have been a release.

Not on one side only was heroism displayed, the infectious heroism of masses as well as that of individuals. At Roche-les-Murs a detachment of Blues

[1] *Mémoires*, Madame de Sapinaud.

had been surprised. The spot, a rock overlooking the river, was backed by the Loire; and, menaced by the royalists, no escape was possible for the Parisian battalions there encamped. Behind them the river, in front the enemy, surrender or death were the sole alternatives. If the Parisian soldiers bore no good character for experience or for discipline, they knew how to die. As the Vendeans pressed on, the remains of the regiment, as if moved by a common impulse, flung themselves, with the cry "*Vive la République!*" into the river below, carrying with them the arms that would have fallen into the hands of the royalists.

A woman, young and fair, the wife of a commanding officer, stood by, her child in her arms, watching the scene.

"Surrender," cried the Vendeans. "No harm shall befall you."

But life had no value for her. For all answer, she sprang with her child into the river.[1]

The war was insensibly changing its character. Royalist recruits were fast coming in as the fight gained in importance and notoriety. Emigrants returned to strike another blow for their King and for the old order of things. Officers who had served in the royal army came to offer their experience to the Vendean generals. The number of deserters from the opposite camp increased and were with others formed into separate battalions, French, German, and Swiss—these last mainly the survivors of those who had fought at the Tuileries.

And at Paris, far from the scene of war, more efficacious means of repressing the rebellion were being devised, methods taking their colour from the

[1] *La Vendée Militaire*, Joly-Crétineau.

atmosphere prevailing in the capital, with its callous disregard of human suffering, its spendthrift recklessness of human life. What those methods were to prove was foreshadowed in a speech made by Barère on August 2, when he stigmatised La Vendée as the rallying-point and centre of all sedition :

" Destroy La Vendée, and Valenciennes and Condé are no longer in the power of the Austrian. Destroy La Vendée, and the English will no longer occupy Dunkirk. Destroy La Vendée, and the Rhine will be delivered from Prussia. Destroy La Vendée, and Spain will be harassed, vanquished by the men of the South in combination with the victorious soldiers of Mortagne and Chollet. Destroy La Vendée, and the resistance of Lyons will cease ; Toulon will rise against Spanish and English; and the spirit of Marseilles will rise to the height of the republican revolution. Each blow you strike at La Vendée will re-echo in the rebel cities of the federalist departments and the invaded frontiers."

Destruction, wholesale and thorough, was the keynote of the policy to be pursued. The same day that Barère's speech was made the Convention passed an ominous decree :

" The Minister of War will dispatch to La Vendée combustible materials of all kinds, for the purpose of burning the woods, the copses, and the undergrowth. The forests will be cut down, the dens of the rebels destroyed, the harvests will be cut, and the cattle seized. The property of the rebels will be declared to belong to the Republic." At the same time it was enacted that women, children, and old men should be escorted into the interior of the country and cared for with all regard to the principles of humanity.

Not all adherents of the Republic were in sympathy with these drastic instructions; in many cases the municipal and local authorities showed themselves anxious to put as mild an interpretation as possible upon the directions of the central government; nor was it till some months later that, by means of the "infernal columns" organised by General Turreau, the policy of destruction was carried fully out. General Boulard, in particular, whose conduct of the war in Lower Vendée had been unusually successful, was far from approving the prescribed severity or welcoming the plans submitted to him by a lady belonging to Sables, who appears to have viewed his leniency with suspicion. To destroy all mills and ovens in the disturbed districts appeared to his self-constituted adviser an expedient worthy of adoption. "Let us be on our guard," she said, "against that deceptive compassion which might give us pause on account of innocent persons scattered here and there in this unhappy country. Let them come and ask us for bread, and we will give it to them; but let us allow no ovens or mills to remain."

Methods such as these the government was to adopt. In the meantime it would have been well if severity had been employed, not alone against the royalist inhabitants, but against the undisciplined troops by whom the province was overrun. Not a week before the edict of destruction had been passed, Brulé, National Commissioner in La Vendée, had sent the Committee of Public Safety an unvarnished account of the condition of affairs.

"It is impossible to convince Paris," he wrote from Tours, "of the importance of the war in La Vendée. The refuse of the other armies are sent us as com-

manders. . . . Neither instruction nor discipline exist in the army. Our soldiers commit actions inspiring horror. I cannot report all the violations, robberies, murders. . . . I am told that women have died of despair. At the fight before the last our wagons of ammunition went off from some unknown cause. It seems that matches had been enclosed in them. Our unhappy soldiers were escorting an ambulant mine, the explosion of which threw more than sixty of them to the ground. The next day 4,000 brigands put to flight more than 50,000 republicans."

It was when matters were in this condition that the forces of the Republic in La Vendée received an important accession. Condé, Valenciennes and Mayence had fallen, their garrisons being permitted to capitulate on condition that they should pledge themselves not, for the space of a year, to bear arms against the crowned heads of Europe. By a criminal oversight no mention was made of La Vendée, and the seasoned troops of the frontier were free to take their part in the struggle there going forward. The oversight, if such it was, cost the revolted provinces dear. On July 26 it was determined by the Committee of Public Safety that the army of Mayence should be sent at once to La Vendée. There it arrived, commanded by able generals whose presence was to be disastrously felt by the royalists—men some of whom were to participate in the fate of those who had preceded them, and to be deprived of their command. Others, though regarded with suspicion and dislike by jealous rivals, were too valuable to be lightly discarded. Of the number of these last was Kleber, whose share in the ultimate ruin of the Grande Armée was perhaps more important than that of any

other general. Born at Strasburg, he was at this time forty years of age, and having served his apprenticeship in the Belgian army had taken service, in 1792, in a battalion of French volunteers, where he rapidly rose to distinction. Six feet high, well-built and athletic, he was one of the most striking looking men of his time. "No one," Napoleon once exclaimed in admiration—"no one is so handsome as Kleber on the day of a battle." A man of changing moods, unwilling to submit to an authority he despised, and open in the expression of his discontent, he had no difficulty in enforcing obedience upon the men he commanded; his will was theirs—the will of a general who was in full sympathy with his soldiers and shared many of their tastes and habits. Such was the man who had now arrived in La Vendée, and who, though from first to last opposed to the brutalities there practised, was prepared to exert himself to the utmost to crush the rebellion.

The army of Mayence, as it continued to be called, numbered 12,000 on its arrival. It was commanded by Aubert-Dubayet, Kleber taking charge of the vanguard. Beaupuy and Vimeux also served in it. The newcomers were at once attached to the army of the Côtes de Brest, so that it was under Canclaux that Kleber's campaign in La Vendée began—a campaign carried on in a spirit contrasting sharply with that of many of the men with whom he was to be associated. "I could not help sighing," he wrote, "over the fate of these unfortunate people who, misled and excited to fanaticism by their priests, reject the benefits of a new order of things to rush upon certain destruction."

Meantime it was not to be wondered at if the

neglect of the needs and the perils of La Vendée displayed in the terms made with regard to the Mayençais troops had roused in the minds of the royalists a certain mistrust of the good faith of powers who had hitherto afforded them no assistance in their desperate struggle. The champions, in a measure, of royalty throughout Europe, they were justified in anticipating support. To England more especially their eyes had turned in the hope—the vain hope, as it was to prove—that she might make a descent upon the coast; and this hope, though constantly disappointed, died hard. It was at this time that an incident took place in this connection, for the details of which Madame de La Rochejacquelein is chiefly responsible.

Certain of the Vendean chiefs—Lescure, La Rochejacquelein, Donnissan, Marigny, Desessarts, with the Bishop of Agra, were gathered together at La Boulaye for a few days' rest, when a young Breton, the Chevalier de Tinténiac by name, presented himself before them in the character of a messenger charged with important dispatches from England, which he carried as wadding in his pistols.

Tinténiac had already, at twenty-nine, had some experience of life, had been in love, had fought duels, and had been discarded by a family of rigid morals. He had subsequently entered upon a course of perilous enterprises, conspiracies and plots designed to further the royalist cause; had journeyed from country to country, and finally, in England, had learnt that the Cabinet required an emigrant to carry dispatches to La Vendée.

He presents himself to Pitt. Pitt, perhaps in order to test him, puts before him all the risks he will run. "Be so good as to give me your instruc-

tions," says Tinténiac with a smile, "and I will start."[1]

Crossing from Jersey in a fishing-boat, he had landed on the St. Malo coast, without so much as the protection of a false passport, had crossed Brittany on foot and in disguise, traversing a country full of republican troops, had been rowed across the Loire by faithful oarsmen, in spite of the warships patrolling the river, had reached at length a royalist camp, from whence he had been escorted to La Boulaye. Such were the antecedents, true or legendary, of the adventurer confronted with the Vendean chiefs. Bonchamps and d'Elbée, it is to be noted, were not of the party, limited at the moment to the group looking to Lescure as its head.

Though doubtless eager to be convinced that England was at length showing a disposition to come to their assistance, Tinténiac's story appears to have been at first received by his listeners with reserve, surprise being shown that the mission should have been entrusted to a man who had no connection with La Vendée. Tinténiac's answer was ready. Some men, he said, had declined the adventure. For his part, "I will own to you, messieurs," he said, "that, independently of my attachment to your cause, I desired to expiate the errors of my early youth, which were great, by a perilous and meritorious deed."

To some ears the explanation, with its touch of dramatic effect, might have rung false; it commended itself to the men he addressed, and they appear to have accepted the speaker at once as a comrade to whom they might speak freely. It is fair to

[1] *La Vendée Militaire*, Joly-Crétineau.

add that the sequel—he was killed in battle two years later—seems to have justified their rash confidence.

The dispatches he produced were from Dundas and from the Governor of Jersey. Expressed in sympathetic terms, they exhibited an amazing ignorance of the condition of La Vendée. Nine questions were asked as to the objects of the rebels, their connection with other provinces or Continental powers, the numbers of the royalist troops, their munitions of war, the assistance required, and the proper place for a landing. Tinténiac spoke further of the desire felt in England to lend support to the royalist cause, and of preparations for a descent on the coast. He added, however, that the refusal of the government to permit pilots to bring emigrants from Jersey to France had raised doubts in his mind as to the sincerity of its professions.

Amongst the Vendean leaders some difference of opinion as to the course to be pursued prevailed. The traditional distrust of England was strong, and Marigny gave it expression. English ideas, he said, perhaps English gold, and the hatred of Englishmen had brought about the Revolution. Hitherto they had asked nothing of England and had preserved their independence. Let them continue to do so. It might be that a snare was laid for them.

Lescure and Donnissan disagreed, and were in favour of securing, if possible, English help. Their views, it would appear, were shared by d'Elbée, to judge by the answer ultimately returned to the British inquiries, dated from Châtillon—not, as Madame de La Rochejacquelein asserts, from La Boulaye—and bearing his signature as President of the Council and

general-in-chief.[1] In this document a list of the royalist generals was supplied, with their several positions in the army. A landing at Sables or Paimbœuf was recommended, and a force of 50,000 troops was promised, ready to co-operate with the English expedition so soon as time and place should have been arranged. One point was specially urged. It was above all things desired that any troops to be landed should be led by a Bourbon prince, and composed in part at least of emigrants. Should this be the case, all Brittany would rise to join the royal forces. To the comte d'Artois himself a letter was addressed expressive of loyalty and devotion and of the ardent desire felt that he—the brother of a King the writers would never cease to mourn, the lieutenant-general of the kingdom and of that unhappy child in whose defence they had taken up arms—should visit La Vendée. "Come then, Monseigneur, come! A descendant of St. Louis at our head will be for us and for our intrepid soldiers the presage of new successes and new victories; and we venture to promise that, with a prince amongst us who is the heir of so many Kings and for whom our love and esteem equal our veneration, we shall prove victorious."

Tinténiac was likewise entrusted with verbal messages to the Bourbons, and was assured that, though he should come destitute of arms or money, a prince at the head of 10,000 men would make success certain. But no Bourbon was to respond to the impassioned appeal; nor did any English ships come to the assistance of the rebels.

[1] *Mémoires*, Boutillier de Saint-André; see Introduction by Bossard.

CHAPTER XII

August—September

Royalist defeat at Luçon—Recriminations—Fitful successes—Republican measures—Divided authority—Rossignol suspended—And reinstated—A republican protest.

A bold stroke was about to be attempted. In the neighbourhood of Luçon the royalists had twice suffered defeat, and a fresh attack upon the town was planned during the early days of August. The Swiss battalion, remembering the massacre of their comrades at the Tuileries, would have liked it to take place on August 10, the anniversary of their death. It was made four days later.

On this disastrous occasion Charette and his followers fought for the first time side by side with the soldiers of the Grande Armée, an invitation being sent to him to bring the forces under his command to meet d'Elbée and his troops and to join in the projected attack.

The army was in a condition of excitement and emotion. A false report that the queen had already died upon the scaffold had raised indignation to fever-heat. Many of the peasants were in tears, and their desire for vengeance was quickened by an address from Bernier. Mass was said in the open air. When a child of eleven, armed with a pistol, entered the camp demanding permission to fight for King and religion, enthusiasm reached almost the point of frenzy.

"I am young Duchaffault," said the boy, in answer to the questions put to him. "I have run away from my mother's château to join my brother, who is serving amongst you. He has been wounded in the arm by a bullet. I am burning to distinguish myself, like him, in the royal army."

After receiving an ovation from the peasants he was sent back to his mother. But some months later he again escaped and carried out his purpose, being killed with his brother.[1]

Charette had been ready to take part in the present venture, and did what he could, though with moderate success, to obtain the co-operation of other leaders in Lower Vendée. On August 11 he started with some 6,000 men for the rendezvous, his soldiers in the high spirits with which it was his special gift to inspire them. Saint-Hermine was reached on the 13th, and there a junction with the Grande Armée was effected, all the chiefs of the latter save Bonchamps, kept away by his wound, being present.

Each of the two bodies of troops must have looked curiously on the other. Fighting in the same cause, using the same watchwords, the soldiers of Upper Vendée, devout and serious, had as little affinity with Charette's boisterous bandits as their leader with men such as Lescure or d'Elbée. "It is the camp of Richard Cœur de Lion in the presence of that of St. Louis."[2] One thing both leaders and men had in common—their courage. "I had heard M. de Charette spoken of," Lescure afterwards said to his wife. "We never ceased watching each other during

[1] *La Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

[2] *Histoire de la Vendée Militaire*, Joly-Crétineau. *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, Bittard des Portes.

the battle. We fought the one as well as the other, and when the combat was over, we asked for each other's friendship."

It was a friendship, one fancies, to be more easily carried on apart than together; but it would have been well had the other chiefs of the Grande Armée been as favourably impressed as was Lescure by their new comrade. Even the evening after the first meeting did not pass without friction. As the generals were dining together, Charette, as the guest, was courteously bidden to choose his position in the projected attack.

"The nearest to the enemy," was his reply, and he was accordingly assigned the place of honour in the vanguard.

After this concession on the part of the Upper Vendean generals it was the more ill-judged on the part of the newcomer to observe, remembering the two failures of his hosts in connection with Luçon, that he could take the town single-handed with his small force. As his biographer observes, though d'Elbée, Lescure, and La Rochejacquelein, generous to a fault, might excuse the boast, others would find their cordiality towards the braggart diminished; and it is suspected by M. Bittard des Portes that consequent coldness on their part may have conduced to impair the unity of action on the morrow essential to victory.[1]

Talmont, looking down from the height of his birth and position on the soldier of fortune, clearly took the first opportunity of returning the blow. Accompanying d'Elbée on his inspection of the several divisions of the army, the Prince addressed

[1] *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*

the soldiers of Charette in a tone far from conciliatory.

"Soldiers of Charette's army," he said, "I hope you will fight as you should. If you do not fight well, look at the soldiers of the army of Anjou."

Charette was not the man to endure insolence, though from a prince, with meekness.

"I do not doubt the valour of the soldiers of the Angevin army," he cried hotly. "But I answer for it that my own will not fall back under fire."

The spirit of rivalry thus aroused was not one to ensure cordial co-operation. Nor was Charette the only one of the leaders indulging in over-confidence. When Beauvais—he calls himself the Cassandra of the war—pointed out to Lescure the inferiority of the Vendean to the republican cavalry, the latter replied that he might be reassured—he could himself put a squadron of the Blues to flight.

It was Lescure who traced out the plan of attack adopted, after some discussion, by his comrades. When it had proved a failure and causes were sought, d'Elbée is said by Madame de La Rochejacquelein to have reproached Lescure for his pertinacity in urging it, whilst Lescure complained that the general-in-chief had not taken proper means to ensure its success.

"The plan was yours, monsieur," d'Elbée is reported as answering. "You should have directed the whole affair."

The words, if correctly reported, ring like sarcasm. D'Elbée was undoubtedly responsible for the execution of a plan to which he had given his sanction, whether or no it had originated with a subordinate.

From the beginning of the fight its conduct augured ill for the royalists. Mistakes were made in the

arrangements. Lescure and Charette, fighting side by side, were at first successful; but d'Elbée, commanding in person the central force, was behind his time; Stofflet's division, by some unfortunate blunder, interposed between the artillery and its ammunition; Talmont's cavalry were ill-placed, crowded behind La Rochejacquelein's infantry, with the river behind them; and when the foot soldiers were beaten back both bodies alike fled across the water by the bridge of Minclaye, La Rochejacquelein covering their retreat till not a peasant remained behind. The artillery shared the general panic, and turned to take flight before it had fired a score of times. Lescure and Charette, isolated and unsupported, had no alternative save to retire. The rout was complete. On the following day 800 Vendean soldiers, fallen into the hands of the Blues, were shot. Six thousand were said to have been killed in the fight.[1]

Charette and his men had joined in the retreat. Turning now and again to face the enemy and secure time to permit the flying troops to cross the river, he made his way, followed by the fire of the republican artillery. In such emergencies the captain of banditti is seen at his best, and in a light explaining the close tie between himself and his troops. As the fugitives went by, a wounded soldier, unable to follow, was entreating his passing comrades to save him.

"Friends of the good God," he implored, "take pity on me!"

But none were found to risk their lives by delay, till Charette himself rode that way, covered with mud, black with powder.

[1] For a detailed description of the battle, see *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, Bittard des Portes, pp. 136 *et seq.*

"*Mon général*, save me!" cried the wounded man. Charette at once stopped, with words of cheer.

"*Oui, mon ami*," he answered, "it shall not be said that I abandoned one of my soldiers."

Dismounting, he lifted the man to his horse, sprang on to it himself, and rejoined the column amidst the acclamations of his soldiers.[1] It was deeds like this that made a man far from admirable in many respects the idol of his troops. When that hard day's work was over, it is said that the wounded man was fast bound to his chief by his scarf, that Charette's clothes were stained with his blood, and that not without difficulty could he be released from the burden he had borne so long.

The retreat was made in different directions by the Grande Armée and by Charette and his troops. Both, however, met at Chantonnay on August 15, where it is stated by more than one contemporary authority that bitter reproaches were exchanged. "Each," says Béjarry, aide de camp to M. de Royrand—"each attributed to the others the melancholy result. There had been mistrust beforehand; they attacked each other afterwards." The next morning Charette and his men took their way homewards, reaching Légé on the 17th.

The battle had been disastrous—the defeat is said to have produced an effect never afterwards erased; the spirit of discord it revealed amongst the chiefs of the Grande Armée was a greater calamity, full of warning for the future. Yet, if the fortunes of the royalists were declining, it was not uniformly. Now and again some brilliant triumph came to cheer

[1] *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, Bittard des Portes. M. Emile Grimaud has written a poem on this incident.

them and to lead the younger and more sanguine spirits to hope that ultimate success might still be secured. Of this number was a victory belonging to the first week in September, when Lescure and La Rochejacquelein, in conjunction with Royrand, met the army by which they had been defeated at Luçon, and falling in especial upon a battalion which, bearing the name of Le Vengeur, had acted up to its title, annihilated a force of 8,000 men, of whom no more than some hundreds survived. Upon this occasion the little chevalier de Mondyon—the boy who had escaped from his school in Paris to join the insurgents—distinguished himself by sternly refusing to permit an officer, on the pretext of a wound, to leave the battle-field.

"I do not see it," answered the boy, to whom the explanation had been apparently offered, "and as your retiring will discourage our soldiers, I will shoot you through the head if you move a step."

The officer, fearing the boy more than the enemy, remained at his post, and Mondyon triumphed.

The victory was marred by reprisals, most of the prisoners taken being shot. Three hundred soldiers belonging to the battalion Le Vengeur, the first to carry out the policy of fire,[1] were sent, with their captain, a young man named Monet, to Mortagne, were brought before a military tribunal, and sentenced to death as guilty of murder and incendiarism; Monet, notwithstanding the intercession of Madame de Sapinaud, whose sympathy he had enlisted, sharing their fate. Resigning himself to the inevitable, he sent for a priest, and died, calm and repentant, a Christian death, his end producing a

[1] *Mémoires*, Boutillier de Saint-André.

singular impression upon the officer charged with the supervision of the execution.

"I have Colonel Monet's death always before my eyes," he told Madame de Sapinaud. "... It is the first time I have seen a man shot. It will be the last. I should die of grief." [1]

The successes occasionally won by the royalists could not blind the more clearsighted amongst the Vendean leaders to the fact that their situation was growing desperate. Foreign co-operation might have saved them, but it was not forthcoming. France, outside the districts engaged in the struggle, was either apathetic or hostile. It remained for them to sell their lives dear, and this they were determined to do. There was no talk of surrender.

The enemy were concentrating their forces, and preparing for a campaign on the revised methods of fire and sword enjoined by the Convention. They had also under their consideration other possibilities of precipitating the destruction of the revolted province—possibilities less attended with peril to those who should make use of them than the old-fashioned system of open fight.

Santerre, not noted for his courage in the field, had again suggestions to make.

"I cannot approve of the fabrication of pikes," he wrote on August 22 to the Minister of War, "and I regret the expense incurred. . . . Mines are wanted! —mines *à force*! . . . soporific fumes, and then to fall upon them!" [2]

Rossignol's views were in accordance with those of Santerre, and he, too, was in favour of kindred con-

[1] *Mémoires*, Madame de Sapinaud. The story is denied by Fr. Grille.

[2] Savary.

trivances. "It is to be desired," he wrote, "that the citizen Fourcroy should be sent to this army, to assist us with his knowledge, so that we may at length arrive at the destruction of the brigands. This is the opinion of one of your brothers and friends who is acquainted with his chemical talents."

Fourcroy did not visit La Vendée. But at the request of Robespierre and his colleagues he prepared a report intended to carry out Rossignol's purpose. Other men of science were likewise devoting their attention to the same end. A so-called physician-alchemist arrived at Angers with a composition of which the fumes, released by fire, were warranted to asphyxiate every living creature near; and the experiment was tried, though without success, on sheep.[1] Another preparation, it was boasted, would infect a whole countryside; but again it proved a failure.

Such expedients were not necessary to crush the rebellion, a rebellion that had no means of supplying the place of the men who had fallen, and against which all the resources of the Republic were now marshalled. The real, the single, forlorn, hope for La Vendée lay, rather than in its own waning strength, its heroic courage, and its unshaken devotion to the cause it had espoused, in the dissensions of the enemy both at Paris and at the seat of war. The capital was divided against itself as to the treatment to be employed with regard to the rebellious province. Hébertists, Dantonists, and the adherents of Robespierre, were in disaccord. Hébert and his friends would have overwhelmed La Vendée in a common destruction, no matter how many patriots, true to the

[1] Savary.

republican faith, might share in its fate. Ronsin was ready to carry Hébert's views into effect, and to spread desolation throughout the district. Rossignol, too, was prepared to go all lengths in the matter. But even the Committee of Public Safety flinched from the measures proposed, and hesitated to include their adherents in indiscriminate chastisement. The representatives in the west, Bourdon and Goupilleau, also shrank from the idea of wholesale ruin, to be inflicted on innocent and guilty alike. Yet at the Jacobin Club Bourdon justified himself from the charge of having erred on the side of clemency:

"Could I do more?" he cried. "I have burnt seven châteaux, twelve mills, three villages. . . . You desire, it seems, that I should not leave the house of a single patriot standing?"

And whilst Paris was thus divided in opinion, the generals in the west were no less at variance. It could scarcely be otherwise. Canclaux, a soldier of high character, Kleber, Aubert-Dubayet and officers of their stamp, were not likely to co-operate with Rossignol and Ronsin; nor were Ronsin and Rossignol likely to work cordially with rivals of whose reputation they were jealous.

The conflict of the different authorities in the west is conspicuously shown by an incident occurring towards the end of August, when Bourdon and Goupilleau went so far as to suspend the general-in-chief from the exercise of his functions, proceeding to have him arrested on the charge of acts of robbery committed in the house where he had been quartered. More than one of his generals were ready to take part against their chief, others of the representatives proving to be his violent partisans. The wrangle

was terminated by the Convention, which annulled the sentence of suspension and recalled the men responsible for it. Rossignol, repairing to Paris and appearing at the bar of the Convention, was received with applause.

"My heart, my soul," he said effusively—"all belongs to my country," and the honours of the sitting were awarded him.

Notwithstanding the disunion amongst the republicans it was manifest that a plan of operations must be agreed upon, and a meeting for this purpose was accordingly held by the generals and representatives on September 2, at Saumur. The discussion was lengthy and heated, and for some time it appeared impossible to settle upon a common base of action. The most noble speech was made by Vergnes, chief of Canclaux's staff, when he strongly urged the necessity of proceeding against the rebels, not in separate columns, but in large masses. A masterly exposition of the Vendean methods of warfare convinced most of his comrades that he was right. The royalist army, he explained, was raised in a day, a rendezvous being given to the different chiefs where they met, bringing each a contingent from his own district. It then attacked the smaller body by which it was threatened, which was dispersed and driven back before reinforcements could reach it. By these means the rebels had beaten one after the other of the separated columns of the republican army, had become accustomed to fight, and had obtained munitions of war. "Let us profit by our faults," he added, "and abandon the plan of thus attacking the rebels by means of columns at a distance of several leagues from one another, under the pre-

text of surrounding them. . . . La Vendée must be attacked *en masse*."

Vergnes carried the day, and a plan of operation was produced on the lines he recommended, signed and countersigned by both Rossignol and Canclaux as generals-in-chief of the two armies of the Côtes de Brest and Côtes de la Rochelle.

Had the plan agreed upon been adhered to, it is possible that it might have ended by crushing the rebels. But not a fortnight later, orders were issued by Rossignol practically reversing the determination arrived at by the Council. The various bodies of republican troops were directed, for no apparent reason, to retreat, and a wholly insufficient force was left unsupported to cope with the royalist army. Interrogated when too late by the municipal authorities of Saumur as to the motives of this incomprehensible change, he replied " that he had signed the order without giving it much attention, and was moved to the point of growing pale, which made us believe that General Rossignol had had no bad intention." [1]

Whatever had been his intention, the result was to be disastrous to the republicans and was to defer the ruin of the Grande Armée.

At Les Herbiers the royalist generals had likewise held a council of war, when the various posts and duties in the army were freshly apportioned. Formidable as the rebellion was still regarded by those against whom it was directed, the Vendean chiefs were under no illusion as to their chances. " With solemn melancholy they shared amongst them a power which was nothing else but the right to die." [2]

[1] *La Vendée Patriote*, Chassin.

[2] *La Vendée Militaire*, Joly-Crétineau.

They were determined not to die without a struggle, and new arrangements were made to meet the exigencies of the situation. D'Elbée retained his post as commander-in-chief; to Bonchamps was committed the shores of the Loire; to La Rochejacquelein the remainder of Anjou. Lescure had charge of Upper Vendée; Charette of Lower Poitou and the sea-coast. Royrand still commanded the army of the centre.

There was neither rest nor respite for those engaged in the struggle. Fights, too numerous and of too little importance in themselves to record in detail, were of almost daily occurrence, and were undermining the powers of resistance possessed by the royalists. Even victories served to reduce the strength of men who had limited reserves to draw upon. Terror was also being everywhere spread by the methods in use against the rebellious districts.

What was thought of these methods by men accustomed to more soldierly and humane habits is shown by a letter addressed a little later on to Robespierre by an officer named Bouveray, belonging to the army of Mayence. Inserted in the report by Courtois dealing with the documents seized after Robespierre's fall, it was dated September 10, 1793:

"As a witness and actor in the cruel war carried on between French republicans and French royalists, I am sick of all the horrors committed. The cry of my heart is that of nature. To you, oh virtuous legislator, I address it. The soldiers of liberty, we defend the good cause, but how many amongst us are unworthy to serve in its defence. As soon as our army entered La Vendée, every soldier put any one he pleased to death, robbed whom he pleased, under the pretext that he was killing and robbing a rebel or even a man

holding royalist opinions. No trouble has been taken, no precautions used to repress or moderate the ardour for blood and for pillage.[1] Since then, judge how many innocent persons have fallen victims. Yes, it is true to say that the life and property of the best citizens are at the mercy of 24,000 men, amongst whom a large number of scoundrels cannot fail to be found. Each individual belonging to an entire army can carry out and execute sentences of death or confiscation. . . . The thirst for gold and the love of life replace the noble disinterestedness of the soldier, and an army of heroes becomes a mass of undisciplined cowards. I see those amongst us who do not cease to cry out for carnage, who only breathe blood; they take pleasure in cutting the throat of an unhappy and defenceless man and fly at the first shot. I see others who sigh at the necessity of shedding blood, whose hand will never strike at the breast of a disarmed man, who do justice to the virtues of their enemies, and let their errors plead for them. . . . Cruelty makes only cowards; goodness alone forms heroes. As Frenchmen, let us defend liberty, but may our virtues render us worthy of it."

The protest of a republican, embittered by the sight of the demoralisation caused in a body of men of whom he was justly proud by the encouragement afforded to every form of barbarity, explains the terror prevailing in the country and covering the roads with fugitives anxious to place themselves under some species of armed protection—protection it was impossible for the royalist troops always to guarantee.

On both sides every nerve was strained to obtain

[1] This was incorrect, some of the local authorities having done all they could in the matter.

reinforcements. Everywhere the tocsin was ringing, either to summon patriots to take up arms or to call out the royalists. The appeal contained in one of the republican proclamations is a specimen of the emotional attempts made to excite enthusiasm for liberty in places where—as in the disaffected districts—it required stimulation.

"Emerge"—it ran—"emerge from the lethargy in which you have been so long plunged; remember that in other days your forefathers dared to measure themselves against the conquerors of the world. . . . Scarcely on the threshold of life, has selfishness already withered your hearts? No, I will not insult you by believing it. You have slept till now; the dangers of the country were unknown to you. But to-day, when they are certain, when there is no longer any choice save between slavery and liberty, your awakening, like that of the lion, will be terrible. You will crowd around the flags of liberty. Fanaticism, despots, brigands—all will fall before your blows. You have sworn to live free or to die. Remember your promises."

Appeals and menaces combined resulted in the collection of a force highly satisfactory in point of numbers, though to prove less so in other respects. The Republic had apparently yet to learn that a soldier cannot be manufactured in a day.

CHAPTER XIII

September

Charette driven from Légé—Royalists in council—Victory at Coron —Junction of Charette with the Grande Armée—Victory at Torfou—Montaigu retaken—Change of plans.

At this time Charette, compelled by stress of circumstances to quit his own camp, was again to join his forces, though for too brief a space, with those of the Grande Armée.

After the defeat at Luçon he had withdrawn to his post at Légé, most of his troops dispersing after their usual fashion to their homes for a breathing-space, whilst he remained, with a small body of officers and men, also enjoying a brief interlude of comparative rest and gaiety. The variety afforded by the society of women was never lacking in Charette's camp. His wife, it was true, preferred remaining in Nantes; but his young sister, Marie-Anne Charette, passionately attached to her brother, had been his faithful companion throughout the campaign, at hand whenever she could be of use, ready to tend the wounded, whether republican or royalist, caring for the sick, and saving, when it was possible, the lives of the enemy. Madame de la Rochefoucauld also continued in the camp; and Madame de Bulkeley, an amazon who had fought in person in the royalist ranks, had lately, with her husband, joined it.

Charette was as usual leading a double life—now given up to pleasure and dissipation, the

devoted servant of Madame de la Rochefoucauld; now riding forth to the fight, the reckless adventurer, ready to face all hazards. And in the autumn evenings, the day's work over, there would be music and dancing, the doom of the little company all the time drawing nearer and the final parting approaching.

Eight republican army corps were closing in a circle round the ill-fated province, reinforced by the levies called forth by the Convention and making up in all 115,000 men, exclusive of the National Guards and so-called volunteers. By the middle of September Charette had recognised the impossibility of maintaining his isolated position. The policy of fire and sword enjoined by the government was creating an atmosphere of panic. The camp was crowded with fugitives, men, women, and children, who sought shelter there, and for whose subsistence it was impossible to provide. Under these circumstances, he determined to join his forces to those of the Grande Armée, and to break up for the present his permanent camp. Defeat after defeat in Lower Vendée had warned him there was no time to lose, and messengers were dispatched to explain the situation to the chiefs of Upper Vendée and to ask their aid.

Whatever might be their reply it was plainly necessary to evacuate Légé without delay. The dreaded Mayençais were approaching it, the troops were demoralised and terror-stricken, and Charette's measures were taken accordingly. His sister was sent to a place of safety; Madame de la Rochefoucauld was escorted to Montaigu, whither Charette was bound; though, restless and incapable of renouncing her adventurous career, she was to continue it for some months longer, till it found its close on the scaffold.

Charette himself, providing as best he could for the safety of the disorderly mass of fugitives by whom he was accompanied, proceeded in a march that bore greater resemblance to a flight, to lead his soldiers, with others who had joined him from the various bodies of troops in Lower Vendée, to Montaigu.

In Upper Vendée a fresh levy of soldiers had been called out as tidings of the royalist defeats in Lower Vendée were received, and at Chollet some 40,000 men were collected, all the chiefs—save La Rochejacquelein and Stofflet, disabled by wounds—being met together in council. And as they sat in consultation, tidings were brought, not only of Vendean defeats, but of fresh outrages and of villages and farms in flames, rousing those who heard of them to fiercer indignation. Had they themselves pursued too merciful a policy? It was perhaps inevitable that the question should be asked; and some amongst the soldiers and even subordinate officers swore that no more prisoners should be taken.

It was necessary to decide upon a plan of action. Charette must be saved; the new and increasing dangers to be apprehended from the gradually closing circle of the enemy's troops must be met. Again Bonchamps, present at the council, his arm in a sling, urged the project he had advocated throughout. Let them wait a few days till the enemy had penetrated still farther into the Bocage; then fall upon their columns one by one in force and, in case of success, cross the Loire with 10,000 men and raise the country on the other side. Whether the plan would have prospered none can tell; Bonchamps was once again overruled. D'Elbée, more cautious and less sanguine, pointed out the danger of leading the Vendean peasant

away from his home, and negatived the proposal; and Bonchamps, as in duty bound, submitted to the judgment of the general-in-chief. On September 18 the Grande Armée marched out of Chollet prepared to meet the enemy, now reinforced by the redoubtable Mayençais.

Whilst Charette had experienced a fresh defeat at Montaigu and, driven out of the town, was awaiting his allies at Tiffauges, a royalist victory had been gained at Coron, where Piron, at the head of a few thousand men, had routed a force commanded by Santerre and Ronsin and numbering more than 40,000. In the absence of any of the leading generals, and with no more than two or three pieces of artillery, a brilliant success had been obtained. Neither of the republican leaders were men of valour, and their troops, composed in great part of the new levies, displayed still less.

"It is not men who are fighting us—it is lunatics," exclaimed Ronsin, as he was driven back. "Let us die here," he said to Santerre, the latter, however, retorting with something like a sneer that "he did not die, but behaved like the rest."[1]

The royalist victory was complete. Eighty pieces of cannon fell into the hands of the Vendeans, as well as guns and all kinds of munitions of war; the new levies scattering in terror to their homes. Yet Ronsin had the effrontery to report to Paris that for six days he had been continuously victorious; and, repairing to the capital, proceeded to denounce both

[1] Some say that Ronsin did make an attempt to rally the troops, himself carrying a flag. By others it is stated that he concealed his uniform under the garb of a peasant, in order to facilitate his escape.

General Canclaux and the army of Mayence at the Jacobin Club.

This initial triumph was cheering, as the Vendeans prepared for a trial of strength with the enemy, and it was closely followed by another, won by a young Duhoux, at the expense of his uncle of the same name, serving as general under the tricolour flag.[1]

Meantime Charette and the generals of the Grande Armée had joined forces. The meeting took place on September 18. To provide accommodation for the Grande Armée Charette had concentrated his men near Torfou, leaving Tiffauges to the newcomers. Rallying his troops, he had done all that was possible to restore their courage and discipline. Should they now fly, he said, all was lost, and never again would they see him at their head.

In the afternoon the arrival of the Vendean chiefs, in advance of their army, took place; and a consultation was held as to the plan of attack. Though the main body of the republicans were still at Clisson, some of their advanced cavalry was not far off.

As the discussion was proceeding a significant incident took place. From the ranks of Lescure's grenadiers, who had just reached the spot, a voice was heard.

"Are we to say, surrender?" it asked.

Charette took the reply upon himself.

"No," he said—"no prisoners."

Lescure turned, as if in protest, but a gesture from

[1] A joke of the younger soldier is said to have caused the arrest of his uncle. The Vendean troops being short of provisions, their captain told them with a laugh to be easy on the subject. "My uncle will take care to provide them." The pleasantry, reported to the republican authorities, was regarded as a proof of treason.

Marigny and others of the chiefs met his mute remonstrance, and he remained silent.

The excuse, if excuse it be, for the determination thus evinced to be burdened with no more captives is to be found in the multitude of non-combatants, women and children, who, driven from their homes, had accompanied Charette on his march and were crowded together, half-famished, at Tiffauges. To feed prisoners would have been to starve them. The great number who had lately been taken also constituted a practical danger, in case they should turn upon those who had them in charge. It is, however, asserted by republican writers[1] that the orders issued were directed against the Mayençais troops, to whom a special odium attached, it being considered that the pledge exacted from them on their capitulation had been morally, though not technically, violated by their presence as combatants in La Vendée.

That night a midnight Mass was said by the Abbé Bernier, the whole army assisting at it. All must have been aware that the coming fight would be a hard one. It was no raw, inexperienced levies that were now to be met, and Kleber was in command of the gallant Mayençais, having received orders to occupy Torfou and to join forces with Beysser at Tiffauges. It would seem that the republican generals imagined that they had Charette alone to deal with, the presence of the troops of Upper Vendée being unknown to them. The vanguard under Kleber's command numbered only 2,000 men, whilst the royalists were, according to Kleber, more than 15,000 strong; according to Madame de La Rochejacquelein, 40,000.

At nine o'clock on the morning of September 19

[1] *La Vendée Patriote*, Chassin.

JEAN BAPTISTE KLEBER.

From a mezzotint engraving by P. A. Alix after a painting by A. Boilly.

the vanguard of the republicans had reached the spot where the Vendeans were encamped, and the first shots were exchanged. Kleber, with his staff, was at once present in person, and the fight was to begin. The armies were face to face.

"At the sight of these Mayençais," says M. Joly-Crétineau, "so proud of their reputation and of their concerted movements, a thrill of admiration runs through the ranks. The two opposed columns contemplate each other with an indefinable feeling; here it is pity, there envy—republican pity for the royalists, who, bare, ill-armed, almost without formation, advance to the combat; admiration of the Vendeans for the brilliant soldiers who are the legacy of the monarchy to the republic; soldiers so well disciplined, executing their manœuvres with such precision, and seeming to be hastening to a festival."

A royalist defeat at first seemed imminent. Kleber, making no delay, had thrown two battalions upon Torfou; the Vendean troops were driven out of the village and the thatched roofs of the houses set on fire. When Charette, who had been inspecting Bonchamps' men at Tiffauges, hurried to the scene of action he was met by his own in flight, and when Lescure, with his special followers, hastened to his support, the infection of terror showed signs of spreading from Charette's soldiers to the Upper Vendean peasants. Lescure threw himself from his horse.

"Are there four hundred men brave enough to come and die with me?" he cried, with one of the personal appeals that rarely failed to win a response. It did not fail now.

"All of us, M. le marquis," was the reply. "We will follow you wherever you wish."

At the head of 3,000 men Lescure held the field for two hours, whilst Bonchamps, still disabled by his wound and carried on a litter, was bringing up his division, and Charette, mortified and indignant at the conduct of his troops, was doing what he could to rally them, strangely assisted by a contingent of women. Praying, at a little distance, for the success of the royalists, they had perceived Charette's troops in flight, and had confronted them, armed with sticks and stones and pitchforks.

"We are worth more than you men," they cried. "We are not afraid."

Bonchamps, reaching at length the spot, flung himself from his litter.

"Whites," he shouted, "the eyes of the Blues are upon you!" and joined in the battle.

Some of Charette's men had returned to the charge. Bareheaded, their leader was carrying his hat on the point of his sabre.

"*Mes amis*, since you abandon me," he cried, "I will myself conquer or die. Let whosoever loves me follow me."

The tide had turned. D'Elbée had reached the battlefield, and the Vendeans, like a rising flood, were overwhelming their enemies. No alternative remained to the republicans save, were it possible, to retreat. To Kleber, a consummate soldier, of unflinching courage, it was due that the retreat did not become a flight. Wounded in the shoulder and carried in the arms of his grenadiers, he directed the operations. He, at least, had soldiers he could trust. The retreat had to be covered.

"Stand there," he bade a captain called Chevardier, "and die with your battalion."

"*Oui, mon général,*" was the response, and he was obeyed to the letter.

The battle was over. The Vendeans had won another triumph, and over the best troops ever arrayed against them. If, in the face of their great advantage in numbers it would seem that too much has been made of the victory by royalist writers, the fact that the Mayençais had been beaten by peasants may excuse it.

"You have dishonoured the laurels you won at Mayence," Canclaux told them—he had hurried from Clisson only to receive tidings of defeat.

"It is not surprising," was the reply. "Those devils in sabots fight as well as we do and shoot better."

As for Kleber, the request he made to Canclaux was characteristic. He begged that no artillery should be given him until he should have taken from the enemy as much as he had lost.[1]

When the Vendean generals met that night at Tiffauges, they must have been proud men; and once again it may be that hope revived. A plan of operation was at once determined upon. Canclaux at Clisson, Beysser at Montaigu, were to be simultaneously attacked. To Lescure and Charette was entrusted the last enterprise, to Bonchamps and Lyrot, a chief of Lower Vendée, the first. "The plan," says M. Bittard des Portes, "was wisely conceived, and only demanded for its success that all should work together and that private interests should be forgotten." But these were conditions difficult to obtain.

No time was lost in putting it into execution. That very evening Bonchamps went to collect his troops in preparation for the blow he was to strike.

[1] *Kleber: Sa Vie et Correspondance*, Pajol.

So soon as Beysser had been driven out of Montaigu the forces to be sent thither for that purpose were to proceed to support him by making an attack upon the Mayençais.

At Montaigu the royalists were completely successful. Almost before Beysser had received tidings of Kleber's defeat, Lescure, Charette, and Joly were upon him. His troops were wearied with the work of devastation and incendiarism on which they had been engaged, and watch was carelessly kept. More reckless than vigilant, Beysser was not prepared for an attack, the town was taken by storm, and the republicans, with the loss of some of their artillery and of many men, fell back on the road to Nantes.

And here Beysser, daring, violent, brave, disappears from La Vendée. Wounded in the side, he reported himself to Canclaux in terms showing that he fully grasped his position—a man already suspected as a Girondist and further weighted with failure.

"My wound," he wrote, "will doubtless not be dangerous. But, *mon général*, there is another wound from which a republican soul is healed with difficulty." Two days later he was summoned to Paris, consigned to the Abbaye on a charge of federalism, and only left it for the scaffold.

The Vendeans remained masters of Montaigu; where it became necessary for d'Elbée to intervene, lest the unhappy town, occupied against its will by the republican forces, should be again treated as conquered territory by Charette's fierce soldiers. Whilst the Grande Armée kept for the most part to its old habits, the troops of Lower Vendée had scant compassion on the vanquished, and prisoners had little to hope from them. How far their savagery

was carried on this occasion must remain uncertain. Kleber, whose veracity is beyond doubt, asserts that the deep well of the château was found, eleven days later, full of the bodies of republican soldiers; other writers declare, without proof, that, by the orders either of Charette or of Joly, wounded and living men had been thrown into it. It is manifestly impossible to say whether the victims were alive or dead, but in the face of other crimes perpetrated in the wild regions of Lower Vendée the charge cannot be dismissed as altogether incredible, and the fact that, after the victory at Torfou, bodies were found half-burnt on the route of the flight is proof of the spirit of wanton ferocity abroad.

At dawn of day the Vendean leaders met to concert a future plan of action. Had the scheme elaborated at Tiffauges been carried into effect and the forces of the Grande Armée and Charette concentrated against the republicans at Clisson, permanent results might have been obtained from the brilliant victories that had been won. Unfortunately, tidings had reached Charette during the night which disinclined him to adhere to it. He had been informed that the foes in Lower Vendée to whom he owed an especial and personal grudge had occupied Saint-Fulgent and were spreading desolation around them. He therefore urged upon the generals of the Grande Armée to defer the attack upon Clisson—to be made in conjunction with Bonchamps—and to descend at once upon Saint-Fulgent.

With Bonchamps awaiting them at Clisson, it is not strange that his brothers-in-arms were reluctant to accede to Charette's demand. D'Elbée, as commander-in-chief, supported by most if not all of his subordinates, was anxious that the engagement

to Bonchamps should be kept, the rather as it was doubtful, the state of the country being taken into consideration, whether he could receive due notice of the change of plan. Charette, however, was vehement in pressing his proposal; in the end Lescure was gained over to his side, and at two in the afternoon the remainder of the chiefs showed their sense of the necessity of co-operation by agreeing to adopt the new scheme, trusting to the chance that a messenger would reach Bonchamps in time to enable him to recast his movements to suit the altered situation. Charette, in fact, only lately practically saved from ruin by the help of the Upper Vendeans, had assumed the direction of affairs and carried all before him. The opportunity of striking a decisive blow was lost, in order that a comparatively unimportant post should be captured.

The mistake was a fatal one. The Mayençais, attacked by the whole army before they had had time to make good their retreat to Nantes, might have been annihilated. The chance was squandered, and incomparably the most formidable troops at the disposal of the Republic were permitted to escape.[1]

[1] By some authorities Lescure is charged not only with having supported Charette in this matter, but with having originated the idea of substituting an attack on Saint-Fulgent for the junction agreed upon with Bonchamps' forces. "Lescure and his adherents were the cause of the abandonment of the project of marching upon Canclaux," says Beauvais, ". . . I imagine because the enemy . . . beaten again there, would by this last defeat leave the country adjoining that under Lescure's command free." The Abbé Bernier also affirmed that Lescure and not Charette occasioned the change. It appears nevertheless far more likely that the practical breach of faith with Bonchamps was mainly due to the latter, though he doubtless gained Lescure over to his opinion.

CHAPTER XIV

September—October

Capture of Saint-Fulgent—Charette abandons the Grande Armée—Bonchamps' reverse—Republican successes—Canclaux and other generals superseded—Offer made by the Mayençais—Léchelle commander-in-chief—Châtillon taken and retaken.

At Saint-Fulgent all went well. For the first time the Vendeans were persuaded to attempt a night attack, and falling upon the republican troops, under the command of a new general, Miezkowski, surprised him in the dark. The town was surrounded, and Charette, riding through the streets by torchlight, a little peasant he carried behind him beating a drum, was the first to enter it, followed by no more than thirty soldiers. The army soon followed. The Blues numbered only 3,000, the royalists 15,000; and the former had no alternative save to give way, effecting their escape as best they could—the town being almost encircled by the enemy—leaving their artillery and munitions of war behind.

The success had been easily achieved; but trouble at once ensued. An unfortunate cause of dispute was the booty which had been secured, chiefly by the German and Swiss troops under Lescure's command, before Charette's followers had returned from the pursuit, and of which they felt that they had not received their fair share.

Nor did the difficulty end here. At Les Herbiers, the next resting-place of the royalist troops, the

Upper Vendeans had again been beforehand with Charette's soldiers in appropriating the provisions prepared by the town authorities; and each was disposed to view the other with jealousy rather than with the cordiality felt by comrades fighting in a common cause. Many of Charette's men, indeed, took their way homewards, leaving their leader angry and sore. Money, too, had been seized, and though Lescure gladly acceded to Charette's demand that half of it should be delivered over to him, the wrangle was not thereby concluded. The clothes, shoes, and other necessaries taken had been dispatched to Mortagne, and when Charette proceeded thither to press his claims, it was found that they had been already distributed amongst the needy troops on the spot. Whereupon, without holding any communication with the chiefs of the Grande Armée, who had abandoned their own plans and fallen in with his desire that Chantonnay should be next attacked, he marched back to his former camp at Légé, leaving the Grande Armée to arrive at Les Herbiers, where he was to have awaited it, and to find him gone. The one chance of success was thus wasted through his stubborn obstinacy, the leaders of Upper Vendée having throughout proved their desire to preserve unity of action.

Meantime Bonchamps and Lyrot, having received no message warning them of any change of plan and fully anticipating the support they had been promised, had attacked, with 7,000 men, double the number of the enemy, mainly composed of the Mayençais troops, had succeeded in barring the way to Canclaux, but, unsupported by their comrades, had found it impossible to carry out the original project; and hard

fighting ended in practical failure, charged, not unjustly, by those who suffered it, upon Charette.

In the middle of the battle an incident again occurred testifying to the spirit of vengeance gaining ground amongst the Vendeans. Some of the soldiers belonging to Lyrot's division—it should be remembered that they came from Lower Vendée—having captured five ambulance carts containing wounded men,[1] were proceeding to put them to death when Bonchamps indignantly interposed.

"What are you wretches doing?" he cried.

"These are the men," answered the peasants fiercely, "who have been destroying our harvests, burning our farms, and massacring our wives."

"God, *mes enfants*, forgave His murderers," was Bonchamps' reply. "Be like Him and pardon yours," and the butchery ceased.

Talmont had been with Bonchamps. D'Elbée, leaving Charette, had hastened in person to join him and to share in the consequences of his lack of firmness as commander-in-chief, and the fight was kept up for some time with varying success, the troops being under the delusion that reinforcements were on the way. But in the end, as was inevitable, the retreat of the republicans was effected.

The policy adopted by Charette for the future was indicated in his answer to an appeal for fresh co-operation from Bonchamps. His council of war, he replied, had decided that each chief was thenceforth to act singly and independently in defence of his district. Such a decision was the prelude of certain defeat; nor does the fact that, at the moment it was taken, the

[1] Kleber states that surgeons, wounded, and drivers were alike slaughtered.

Upper Vendean leaders were face to face with the most formidable troops as yet brought against them, redound to the credit of the man responsible for it. "Thanks to the Grande Armée," says his biographer, "victory had returned to the white flag. Charette owed to it the re-establishment of his military prestige, the security of his encampments, the liberty or life of most of his soldiers. His ingratitude, caused by a puerile anger and by petty interests, cannot be excused; it was to have the worst consequences for the royalist cause, and the great services rendered by him later on to that same royalist cause were needed to extenuate the memory of the abandonment of Les Herbiers." [1]

However the blame may be apportioned, Charette and the other chiefs of Lower Vendée had definitely separated themselves from the Grande Armeé, and the latter was to be left to face its enemies alone. Within its own ranks, too, were divisions. The absence of a single head, not in name only, but in influence and authority, was increasingly felt.

Yet it was a time when the struggle was daily becoming more desperate. Victories might have been won; the situation had not been materially altered. Canclaux was elaborating his plans in conjunction with Rossignol. A circle, composed of more than 100,000 men, was gradually forming round the doomed district, whilst the Grande Armée could not muster more than 50,000 or 60,000 men in all. The instructions of the Committee of Public Safety were being carried out, if still incompletely, and the march of the republican troops left a trail of desolation behind it. Over a hundred hamlets and villages had been destroyed by fire.

[1] *Charette et la Guerre de Vendée*, M. Bittard des Portes.

Bonchamps and d'Elbée, camped near Tiffauges with some 10,000 or 12,000 men, sent urgent appeals for help both to Charette and Lescure. From the first no answers were received. Lescure, himself confronted with troops commanded by Westermann, could only reply by the expression of his regrets and apprehensions. Left to themselves Bonchamps and d'Elbée suffered defeat. Kleber had joined forces with Canclaux, and was eager to retrieve his late disaster.

"But, general, we have no guns," cried his soldiers.

"No," was the reply; "we are going to seek those we were forced to abandon at Torfou."

The men responded with acclamation, and d'Elbée and Bonchamps were driven back.

"We had sworn," wrote Kleber, "only to return victorious, and we did not break our word."

The news of the recent republican defeats had by this time reached Paris, and the Government, unaware that the tide had turned, hastened to mark its displeasure by the suspension of no less than twelve superior officers, *ci-devant* nobles, Canclaux at their head. The tidings reached him at the moment when fortune had again declared itself on his side; and when moreover the method of clemency he had put in force in Lower Vendée was producing good fruit in the submission of many of the rebels in that district. In somewhat grandiloquent terms he accepted his disgrace.

"I render thanks," he wrote, "to the preserving genius of liberty, which has sustained me to the close of my career. . . . I retire with the submission of a republican who only serves his country how and when it desires."

The soldiers were less magnanimous. Some of the suspended generals, Dubayet in particular, in command of the Mayençais, were specially popular with the army of Mayence who, brave as they were, were rather of the nature of mercenaries than attached to any special form of government. Angry at the dismissal of men they loved and trusted, they conceived the idea of passing over collectively to the royalist army—a step that might have materially changed the situation.[1] Even before this juncture they had made overtures to Lescure, when Charette and Bonchamps had been in favour of granting all the conditions they demanded and closing with the offer. D'Elbée had been of a different opinion, and had conscientiously demurred at promising what the leaders would not only find difficult to perform, but what they knew beforehand would be impossible; and nothing had come of the negotiations. In their discontent at the removal of their officers the Mayençais renewed their proposals, their demands consisting of regular pay at the rate of seven sous a day, and a lump sum of 400,000 livres.

By an unhappy chance none of the responsible military chiefs were at hand when the communication was received, and it was referred to the Superior Council at Châtillon. Beauvolliers, intendant-general of the army, strongly urged acceptance of the offer, suggesting that the necessary sum should be obtained by melting down the sacred vessels and plate belonging to the churches.

The Council was divided in opinion. The Abbé Bernier and the Benedictine, Jagault, would not have

[1] The incident is denied by republican authorities; but it seems probable that some at least of the troops contemplated desertion.

hesitated to adopt the proposed plan; to others it seemed to involve sacrilege; and the discussion was so much prolonged that the opportunity was lost. Before the Council had arrived at a decision, the new general, Léchelle, had taken Canclaux's vacant place and the Mayençais abandoned their project. The affair, if correctly reported, is another instance of the ineptitude of a body wholly unfitted to deal with military matters.

A piece of good fortune had, on the other hand, befallen the royalists in the appointment made to the republican commandership-in-chief of the army of the West. It had hitherto constituted two separate bodies with Rossignol and Canclaux as generals. It was now to be united under a single head, the announcement of the new arrangement being made in enthusiastic terms by the representatives of the people. No longer were men whose birth caused them to be regarded with suspicion to continue at the head of affairs. "Canclaux and Dubayet, *ci-devant* nobles, are recalled. Léchelle, a man of the people, an old soldier, is your general-in-chief."

The character and abilities of the person to whom this post was entrusted—Rossignol holding under Léchelle the position of general of the division of the Côtes de Brest—will be shown in the sequel. His first appearance at head quarters is described by Savary:

"He arrived on the evening of October 8, accompanied by the representative Carrier and by General Dembarrère. The Generals Kleber"—who had been provisionally in command—"Vimeux, and Beaupuy waited upon him. A council of war was held in the presence of the deputies Merlin, Turreau, and Carrier. Kleber placed before the general-in-chief the con-

dition of the army; and at Merlin's suggestion he briefly explained, with his map before him, what had been done and what was still to be done, according to General Canclaux's scheme, in order shortly to reach Chollet and Mortagne. Léchelle listened to everything, making no comment, and without a glance at the map. Then, suddenly rising, he only said, 'Yes, this project is much to my taste; but it is upon the field that one must show oneself. The march must be made in order, majestically, and in a mass.' At these words Kleber coldly closed his map; Merlin observed aside, 'I believe they have made it their object to send us the most ignorant man they had,' and each person withdrew, not knowing what to think of the commander-in-chief."

Léchelle himself complained to the Minister of War that in his reception by the troops there had been an absence of cordiality, attributed by him to their regret at the recall of Canclaux and Dubayet, and causing him from the beginning to regard the army of Mayence with inveterate dislike. For the rest, he proved, as some one observed, to have wit enough at least to carry out the designs of his predecessor, and it was agreed that Kleber should continue to direct the conduct of the war.

The plan of campaign was to be in future under the more immediate supervision of the Committee of Public Safety, which had—before the news of the late reverses reached it—fixed a date for the termination of the war.

"Soldiers of liberty"—so ran the proclamation issued by the National Assembly—"the Vendean brigands must be exterminated before the end of October. The safety of the country demands it;

the impatience of the French nation orders it; the courage of the French nation should accomplish it. The gratitude of the nation awaits those who by that time will have doubtless finally established liberty and the Republic."

It was a sanguine hope, not likely to be realised by the man in supreme authority in the disturbed districts. If Léchelle, however, was personally incompetent, he had the wisdom to invite Canclaux, though under suspicion as a *ci-devant* noble, to assist at the military council held at Nantes for the purpose of settling upon the course to be pursued. Canclaux, to his honour, was ready to place his experience at the service of his supplanter, and though Carrier, exercising a species of dictatorship at Nantes, declined to profit by it, Léchelle decided by his advice to lead the republican forces to the attack of Châtillon, as the central point of the revolted provinces.

According to the system prescribed by the government, the march was marked by fire and sword—Chalbos, with Westermann under him, in command of one division, whilst the Mayençais were headed by their own generals, Kleber, Beaupuy, and Haxo. The strength of the Grande Armée was grievously diminished, not only by death and disablement, though these had done their work; discouragement, together with the desire to give the protection of their presence to wives and children driven from their homes, tended further to thin the ranks; and when Lescure, La Rochejacquelein, and Stofflet prepared to meet Chalbos—Bonchamps and d'Elbée being detained elsewhere by the necessity of barring the way to the Mayençais—they could muster no more than 6,000

men to confront the 11,000 arrayed against them. The result could scarcely be in doubt. At Moulin-aux-Chévres their defeat took place, though not without a hard struggle, the issue of which was decided mainly by the rash disobedience of Westermann, who had quitted the post assigned to him and, ordered to return to it, answered by a categorical refusal. He was going straight to Châtillon, was the message he sent back. Success justified him. Overwhelmed by numbers, the royalists were flying in confusion and at the mercy of the conquerors, when one of the scenes occurred characteristic of the war. Shouting that they were the generals, and adding their names, Lescure and La Rochejacquelein, well mounted, fled in another direction, thus diverting the pursuit of the hussars from the peasants and obtaining time for the latter to disperse and take shelter in the woods. A general massacre was by this means averted, and they themselves effected their escape.

The defeat nevertheless was complete. Châtillon was seized and pillaged, the royalist Council flying to Chollet, where Donnissan was engaged in the attempt to collect reinforcements—a matter of increasing difficulty. Dissensions between Talmont and Donnissan as to the disposal of what troops could be gathered together had likewise retarded their dispatch, and Lescure felt that he had cause for complaint.

There was little time for recrimination. The blow that had been struck was one it would be difficult to recover from. The situation demanded immediate action. Mortagne was evacuated, in anticipation of the arrival of the enemy, the wounded hitherto lodged there, with the military stores, being removed

to Beaupréau. It was also determined that, uniting their forces, the chiefs of the Grande Armée should attack the victorious Blues, and march upon Châtillon.

Wounded or not, the leaders took their places, Bonchamps and La Rochejacquelein with their arms in slings. No one could be spared. Elated with their late triumph, the republicans were confident of victory. But their very successes were a snare, since the soldiers were more occupied with pillage and with securing their booty than with keeping guard.[1] On the royalist side was the consciousness that defeat would mean ruin.

The attack was made, and again the peasants were triumphant. Westermann, in charge of Châtillon, was driven out of the town, and the Vendeans were left in possession of the artillery and provisions he had been forced to abandon. Châtillon was once more in the hands of the royalists.

But not for long. Tired, hungry, thirsty, and rejoicing, the soldiers fell upon the brandy they discovered amongst their spoil, and presently Châtillon was a city of sleep—a city drugged and intoxicated, at the mercy of the enemy, and soon to become a city of the dead. No one had anticipated danger, though those who knew Westermann and the character he bore might have surmised that he would not tamely submit to defeat. As he fled, pursued

[1] "After having beaten the enemy at Bois-aux-Chévres," wrote the Council-General of the Department of Deux-Sévres, "after having taken possession of Châtillon, the army gave itself up to pillage, and scattered itself about the country. Laden with booty, the soldiers fled instead of rallying." . . . The municipal authorities constantly protested at this time against the love of pillage, "which turns our soldiers into robbers."

by none but a few scattered troops, he turned and faced them; then, meeting a reinforcement commanded by Chalbos in person, he impulsively offered him his sword.

"Every one deserts me," he cried passionately. "I will serve no longer with cowards."

Stung by the reproach, the men around eagerly protested their readiness to wash out their disgrace, swearing that they would hang back no more.

"Then come and die with me at Châtillon," was Westermann's reply.

Taking a hundred hussars, he placed a grenadier behind each, and the small body, every horse bearing its double load, went back to face the enemy again. It was an hour before midnight and a dark night when Châtillon was reached. To the challenge of the sentinels, "*Qui vive?*" Westermann answered by the cry "La Rochejacquelein" and passed on, closely followed by Chalbos. And soon the streets were lit by the flames of burning houses and the carnage began. No pity was shown; sleeping or waking, drunk or sober—all were slain, comrade scarcely able to distinguish comrade, enemy enemy, in the ghastly confusion, and Westermann, the more fierce and remorseless owing to his recent rout, presiding over the butchery. Sex or childhood was no protection. Entering the house where the Prince de Talmont had been lodged, a party of Blues met him on the stairs, just awakened from sleep, and knocked him over, unrecognised, as they rushed past, leaving him unhurt, to kill his hostess, the wife of a republican official, and her children—a blunder that Westermann, arriving upon the scene, avenged by shooting one of the murderers on the spot.

For some three or four hours the Blues remained in the town, burning, slaying, pillaging. No efforts of the Vendean chiefs could avail to rally the terrified peasants; until, at dawn of day, Westermann, taught wisdom by experience, evacuated the town without leaving time for the arrival of royalist reinforcements; his soldiers, their reputation for valour redeemed, singing the Marseillaise as they departed.

When, six hours later, the Vendean chiefs who had escaped from the town returned to it, they found nothing except burning houses, smouldering ashes, and hundreds of corpses; whilst the wretched inhabitants were seeking amongst the ruins friends, relations, and possessions.

With sorrow and shame the guns and munitions captured the previous day were collected, and carried to Chollet, whither the troops retreated. At Chollet sixty-four republican prisoners were made to pay with their lives for the crimes committed at Châtillon. The law of reprisals was gaining ground.[1]

[1] The different accounts of the taking and retaking of Châtillon, of the numbers of the troops engaged on either side, of the share in the affair of Chalbos and Westermann, are constantly at variance. But the main facts appear to be incontestable.

CHAPTER XV

October

Changes in the Grande Armée—Condition of Chollet—Lescure mortally wounded—Desolation in the country—Chollet evacuated—Royalists rally at Beaupréau—Battle and defeat of the royalists at Chollet.

If the position of the royalist army had been precarious before, Westermann's victory rendered it desperate, the situation being further imperilled by the change that had taken place in the army itself—the dissension amongst the leaders and a certain degree of demoralisation amongst the soldiers. Whether or not such demoralisation was due, as their apologists assert, to contact with less single-minded recruits—republican deserters and others—or whether it was the result of a life of constant risk and excitement, they were no longer the men Cathelineau had led to battle, confident in the justice of their cause and in the protection of Heaven.

If salvation were still possible, it could only be hoped for from concerted action, and despairing appeals were again sent to Charette. Would he fall upon the enemy in the rear, and by so doing give a chance—one chance more—to the beleaguered district?

Messenger after messenger was dispatched, but none returned, nor did any reply come back. Charette afterwards declared that no messages had reached him; nor is there any proof that they did. For his honour

it may be hoped that what he said was true. Yet, even in the absence of a definite demand of assistance, he cannot have been ignorant that, in marching towards Noirmoutiers as he was doing, he was leaving his late allies—the men who had saved him in his hour of peril—to face their danger alone.

Meantime the Vendean army was becoming more and more a heterogeneous mass of combatants and non-combatants; fugitives escaped from their burning homes, women, children, old men, all attaching themselves to the Grande Armée for protection, difficult to provide for, and lending additional anxiety to the future as the various detachments moved towards Chollet, now the centre of resistance in Upper Vendée, as it had been at first the central point of rebellion.

A curious picture is given by an anonymous republican [1] of the town he terms the small capital of the rebels—of the nobles who had found a refuge there, of religious ceremonies mingling with dances, concerts, and the like. The description may probably have applied to an earlier date—to the days when all seemed going well. It is difficult to believe that, encircled by a girdle of fire and desolation, and with ruin and death staring them in the face, the inhabitants of Chollet can have found life pleasurable.

Of its condition at this time an idea can be gained from the description given by Boutillier de Saint-André of his own arrival at the town: "We walked hurriedly, without knowing where we should seek shelter, and leaving our future fate to God. . . . My grandfather, my sister, and I remained in the street,

[1] *Guerre Civile de la Vendée.* Par un ancien administrateur des Armées republicaines.

uncertain where to go, all our relations and acquaintances having fled. . . . I saw a great number of Vendeans pass by, led forth to battle. They were no longer the proud, terrible men, in whose bearing and look confidence in victory was legible. In their air of sadness and discouragement, lassitude and defeat were evident. . . . They marched with calm and resignation like Christians going to martyrdom, but no longer like heroes on the way to victory. . . ." [1]

A single factor continued to be in favour of the Vendeans, and the incompetence of the man in command of the republican forces may have seemed to afford a ray of hope. His ignorance was inconceivable. When a report was received at head quarters stating that Noirmoutiers, one of the posts of most importance in the west, had fallen into Charette's hands, the comment of the commander-in-chief took the form of inquiring as to the whereabouts of the captured island. Léchelle had, nevertheless, able subordinates —men well acquainted with the geography of the revolted provinces and with the tactics and methods of the insurgents and the means to be taken if they were to be defeated. " The enemy has at length learnt the secret of victory, " said Bonchamps, " since they are forming in masses to overwhelm us." Towards Chollet the various republican forces were to converge, and there to concentrate themselves. A fight for life or death was clearly at hand.

That decisive struggle was heralded by a misfortune hitting the royalists hard. Lescure was at the château of La Tremblaye on October 14, when he was attacked by a detachment of Blues, and, in the act of shouting to his men to advance, fell struck by a bullet in his head.

[1] *Mémoires*, Boutillier de Saint-André.

To those near him it seemed that all was over.

"He is dead, he is dead," cried young Beauvolliers, his aide de camp, throwing away his sword in despair. But though his master had, in truth, received what was to prove his death-wound he was still living; and a faithful servant contrived to carry him out of the *mêlée* and to convey him to Chaudron on the way to Beaupréau, where he was joined by his wife.

To a woman a public cause often narrows itself to a single and personal issue. The story told by Madame de Lescure of these terrible days must have been representative of the experiences of many others in that time of terror and distress.[1]

Wandering about the country in accordance with the directions Lescure had sent her, she and her mother had lost their way on some of the cross-roads, and had slept at Trémentine on October 15. Sounds of cannon were audible from the direction of Chollet, and at church the next morning many women were gathered together, all anxious, all fearful, when a friend she met greeted her with tears. Perceiving, however, that she was ignorant of her husband's danger, he explained his emotion by the loss of the battle, and confined himself to advising her to go to Beaupréau, where M. de Lescure would be found.

With her baby in her arms—she was no more than twenty-one and was expecting the birth of a second child in the spring—the unhappy wife obeyed, riding to the village of Boze, where the night was spent in a room crowded with soldiers on their way to join Bonchamps' troops. At three in the morning those who slept were awakened by the sound of firing in the distance, and Mass was said in the darkness, the

[1] *Mémoires de Madame de La Rochejacquelein.*

old priest speaking to the men—to the accompaniment of the roar of artillery—of God, their King, their wives, their children—all for whom they were fighting, and giving absolution to those who might be going forth to die.

When Mass was over, the old man, warned that Lescure was dead, strove to prepare his wife for the blow awaiting her; his hearer only attaching a vague though terrifying significance to his words.

"Frozen with terror, I looked at him, not knowing what to think. . . . The noise of cannon redoubled. The peals, approaching nearer and nearer, forced us to leave the church; and whilst I was almost unconscious they set me on a horse, and we fled, ignorant where to seek shelter."

At Chaudron M. de Lescure was found, still living, but with his head shattered; having suffered the additional torture of believing that his wife had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

The disaster which had practically deprived the Grande Armée of one of its most popular generals was a prelude to others. The republican troops, unhindered by any diversion made by Charette, were collecting in greater and greater force in the neighbourhood of Chollet, and though in the encounters of almost daily occurrence victory seemed at times to incline to the royalist side, every effort was necessary on the part of the chiefs to keep the army together and supply it with encouragement and hope. A picture of Bonchamps is given by Beauvais, who, fighting at his side, noted the coolness with which, whilst engaged in watching the movements of the republicans, he jested upon the bullets falling thickly around him, and thus distracted the attention of the men from their danger.

It remained to be considered how best to grapple with the crisis which was clearly at hand, and in a council of war held at Chollet the question was earnestly debated. Bonchamps, strongly supported by the Prince de Talmont, was responsible for a suggestion that, viewed in the light of after events, is believed to have had unfortunate consequences. It has been seen that he had all along been anxious to cross the Loire with his own division and to attempt by so doing to unite the forces of La Vendée with the Breton royalists. Had this been done it might have had a good effect. But some of the chiefs of the Grande Armée—Talmont, Donnissan, and Desessarts especially—went further and had spoken to Beauvais of their desire to cross the river with the main body of the troops. To Beauvais the plan commended itself so little that he had heard no more of it from its promoters. It was now urged by Bonchamps that a passage across the river should be secured and held, so that, in case of defeat, the army might be able to reach a district where the forces arrayed against it would be less formidable.

Bonchamps' suggestion, on the face of it, strikes the reader as reasonable. D'Elbée, however, well acquainted with the nature of his forces, was of another opinion. Quoting the maxim "*On ne se défend jamais mieux que chez soi*," he pointed out that, north of the river, the army would be in an unknown land unprotected by woods, heights, and marshes; that the helpless train of non-combatants would prove a hopeless encumbrance in the march, and that provisions would be lacking. Bonchamps' view was nevertheless so far adopted that some thousands of men under Talmont—men that could ill be spared

—were sent to secure a passage from Saint-Florent to Varades, on the north bank, to be used in case of necessity.

Upon the further question whether or not Chollet should be defended, the leaders were likewise at variance. It was finally determined that, in spite of the strength of its position, the town should be abandoned, the army falling back upon Beaupréau. The peasants, indeed, decided the question. Taking fright at the sight of the republican encampments and fearing to be shut up in a town destitute of stores, they retreated of their own accord. Though the move was not an unwise one, the fact that it was unauthorised is significant of the absence of discipline prevailing in the royalist ranks. The long, desperate courage of the peasants was beginning to flag. Misery and desolation were all around, and the brutal policy pursued by the Government was bearing fruit. The homes in defence of which they had taken up arms were in many cases no longer in existence.

"May I be permitted," writes the military administrator of the republican troops already quoted, "to paint the horror reigning in these districts, traversed by me immediately after the soldiers? I saw not a single man at Saint-Hermand, Chantonnay, or Les Herbiers; some of the women had escaped the sword. All the country houses or cottages visible on the route were the prey of flames. The sky was darkened with smoke. The number of corpses scattered here and there were beginning to infect the air. The flocks did not dare to approach their burning stables; the oxen, the goats, the wandering cattle, awakened the echoes with their long-drawn-out lowing. Night surprised me; but, far from the ravages of

war being hidden from me by its dark veil, the reflection of the fires by which my uncertain march was lit lent them additional horror. . . ."

If to some men the knowledge that their homes were laid desolate, their wives and children either dead or starving wanderers, imparted a fierce desire of revenge, others, in profound discouragement, may well have lost spirit to fight longer. Yet 40,000 men rallied round their leaders when the attack was to be made upon the troops gathered together in the neighbourhood of Chollet. It was October 17 when the battle destined to prove fatal to the hopes of the royalists took place. Events were crowding one upon another. Two days earlier Kleber had occupied Mortagne, had found it evacuated, and had spared the town—as did also General Bard, who followed him thither. On that same day, October 15, Lescure had received his mortal wound, and on the 16th the republican troops were collecting before Chollet, Kleber—who had remained only two hours at Mortagne—being practically in command, and Léchelle, upon whose incompetence all but his personal partisans were agreed, retaining the title of general-in-chief alone. The whole arrangements for the coming fight were planned by Kleber; his eye—the watchful eye of an experienced soldier—was over all. The discipline he enforced was strict. When young Marceau, as yet unknown to him, but one of the foremost republican officers, sought him out at ten o'clock at night, in order to welcome a new comrade, his answer was cold.

"You should not have left your post," he told him. "Return to it at once. We shall have leisure to make acquaintance some other time."

Marceau accepted the rebuke in good part, and it is noteworthy that the two were afterwards close friends.

Two hours later a message from Léchelle, who had retired to the château of La Tremblaye, was brought, to the effect that Chollet was to be cannonaded—an order treated by Kleber with polite disregard. Acquainted with his resources and with their limits, he drew attention to the fact that they were not sufficient to enable him safely to carry out the instructions of the commander-in-chief. "Tell the general," he added, "that we shall enter Chollet to-morrow, and possibly without striking a blow."

His confidence was justified. During that night the retreat of the greater part of the royalist troops left their leaders no alternative save to evacuate the town and fall back upon Beaupréau. At four o'clock in the morning the resolution was taken, the Vendean batteries opening fire at six, so as to cover the withdrawal of the forces. Followed by masses of the inhabitants of the town and others who had taken refuge there, the whole body moved away, La Rochejacquelein and others bringing up the rear and leaving Chollet deserted, except by those of the population in sympathy with the enemy.

Kleber, in possession of the town, lost no time in preparing for the attack he anticipated. His arrangements were complete. Should the royalist army march on the town, he was ready to receive it. Chalbos, with the troops under his command, had arrived to reinforce those already at Chollet; even Léchelle was in the town, though Kleber continued to direct the operations. "If, in the arrangements," he afterwards wrote, "there is no question

of General Léchelle, it is because his nullity had decided the representatives to charge me with the conduct of the operations, of which I was nevertheless, with a regard to usage and custom, to render an account to that general. All my dispositions made, I went to inform Léchelle of them, who, with no further inquiries, confined himself to telling me to have the march made majestically and in a mass."[1]

After which Kleber took what measures he could to prevent pillage and other excesses. Whether or not they were wholly successful must remain doubtful; but it seems clear that the assertion made by Madame de La Rochejacquelein to the effect that when the battle was over the town was set on fire and that the "accustomed horrors" were perpetrated throughout the night is false. The town was, indeed, burnt at a later date, but by Stofflet's orders, after it had been evacuated by the republicans. On the other hand the republican administrator quoted above states that the town was pillaged and the suburbs set on fire, adding that at Beaupréau the same ravages were subsequently committed, from which it would appear that Kleber had been only partially able to enforce his orders.

Meantime, on that very day, October 16, Léchelle was writing to the Convention that the war was practically at an end and that royalty had received its *coup de grâce*. Kleber knew better. At Beaupréau the Vendeans were gathering from all quarters, prepared to make a supreme effort to recapture the position they had lost.

As the chiefs met in council to consider the course to be pursued, each had a different plan to propose. La Rochejacquelein's was finally adopted, and it was

[1] *Mémoires de la Marquise de La Rochejacquelein.*

determined that Chollet should be attacked without delay. At dawn of day on October 17th the army began its march, accompanied by all its leaders. Bonchamps and d'Elbée were there—it was to be the last battle of the two who had been such loyal brothers-in-arms—and La Rochejacquelein, his heart heavy at the absence of Lescure, the man he most loved, and Royrand, and Stofflet. The courage of the peasants was high. If the enthusiasm of past days had sobered down and they no longer sang their litanies as they marched, in joyous certainty of success, they were silent and resolute, and not unexpectant of victory. Yet as they listened to the sound of firing in the direction of the river, whither Talmont had gone to secure a passage in case of need, some among them were heard to observe that, should defeat be their portion, the Loire could be crossed. Nor is it well to contemplate a way of escape.

At Chollet the republican generals mustered strong, and had been joined by the representatives in the west, who had come from carrying out the incendiary work in the neighbourhood of Mortagne left undone by Kleber. Amongst them was Carrier, afterwards to achieve an unenviable notoriety, and who appears to have already earned a reputation borne out by future events, since when on this occasion he fell back at the onslaught of the Vendean troops, Kleber told his men contemptuously to let him through their ranks and place him in their rear. "*Il tuera après la victoire*," added the soldier.

There were too many heads in Chollet. Kleber had his own plans, which he urged upon the officers and representatives, met together at Léchelle's lodgings—he would have divided the republican troops

into three columns and cut off the retreat of the royalists in case they should attempt to cross the Loire; but the general opinion was against him; it was believed that the enemy would best be attacked at Beaupréau, where it was assumed that the army would remain for the present, and to Beaupréau it was determined to march in a body.

"This manœuvre," replied Kleber with scorn, "has the advantage of not putting the mind that conceived it on the rack," and left the council-chamber in dudgeon.

He had found it impossible to convince his technical superiors that the enemy was likely to initiate an attack. By one o'clock it was proved that the royalists were not passively waiting to be dislodged from Beaupréau, and the precipitate retreat of the republican vanguard, under Beaupuy, gave warning to those in the town of their approach.

At first it seemed as though the battle was to result in no victory for the Blues. As the Vendeans advanced in a single massed column the republicans were driven back, their artillery seized, and Beaupuy himself, his horse twice killed under him, was in imminent danger.

"Do not kill him—it is the general—take him prisoner"—Beaupuy heard the order given as he fell; but, contriving to escape, he threw himself again into the fray. Recapturing all their old ardour, the royalists fought as men fight when all is at stake. On some parts of the field of battle the Blues were flying; Marceau, as well as Beaupuy, had been forced to give way; even Kleber and Haxo had been driven back; Carrier was climbing over the shoulders of the crowded troops to escape to a place of safety; Léchelle,

at a convenient distance from the fight, was complaining of being left alone.

"Go under fire," replied Dembarrère, one of the generals, with no attempt to disguise his contempt, "and you will find yourself in good company."

Amongst the republicans all was in confusion. Never, wrote Kleber, had such disorder been seen. Yet, under his direction, a hand-to-hand fight was kept up, and presently, as Marceau and Beaupuy were contending with La Rochejacquelein, he summoned a battalion hitherto kept in reserve, and sent it, its band playing, and in martial array, to their support. For the first time that day the royalists, confronted with the newcomers, recoiled; as they did so a panic—one of those sudden panics it was impossible to cope with—spread amongst their comrades, and in a moment all was changed. Victory—what had seemed almost certain victory—was exchanged for the rout, first of the majority, then of the men who had striven to hold their ground.

In vain the chiefs endeavoured to rally the fugitives, telling them they were throwing away a triumph on the point of being won. "I saw a captain I did not recognise," related an eye-witness of the scene, "who conjured, who entreated, the fugitives to stand firm —nothing was yet lost. . . . All was useless; the flight had begun; nothing could hinder it; seeing which the aforesaid officer flung himself upon the neck of his horse and burst into tears." [1]

And then, in the midst of the wild confusion, a cry was heard—some say it was raised by traitors—which, confirming the flight, contributed to determine the fortunes of the day.

[1] *Guerre de la Vendée*, Deniau.

"To the Loire! to the Loire!" was the shout.

It contained a fatal suggestion of total and irremediable defeat, reminding, besides, those who were still fighting that a way of escape lay open. The river once crossed, they would be in safety. The effect was instantaneous. Some fled one way, some another; yet the leaders would not leave the field. It was eight o'clock in the evening—a dark October evening—when, at the head of 400 volunteers, Bonchamps, d'Elbée, La Rochejacquelein, and others made their last desperate effort to redeem the fortunes of the day. In the fight one officer after another—republican and royalist—succumbed; then, as d'Elbée and Bonchamps still fought on, the two received almost simultaneously what was in each case to prove their death-wound. D'Elbée, in addition to thirteen lesser wounds, was shot through the chest; Bonchamps, struck by a ball, fell from his horse. It is said—it seems strange—that he was at the moment reading a letter which had just reached him from Talmont. It is also stated that the shot was fired by a deserter, explaining what was afterwards said by the dying man, "*Je meurs de la main des miens.*" Others interpret the words as referring to an involuntary injury done him in the confusion and heat of the struggle. However that may be, both the chiefs of the Grande Armée were seen to fall together.

"Let us die with them," cried La Rochejacquelein as he saw it, "not retreat." But in spite of himself he was swept backwards by the fugitive torrent. Bonchamps and d'Elbée were in imminent danger of being captured by the Mayençais. Rescued by their men, they were removed from the field, the sight, the one on a litter, the other behind a horse-

man, putting the finishing-touch to the scene of despair; and thus ended the fight of that disastrous day.

It had not been won by the republicans without heavy loss. Kleber, with the readiness of one brave man to recognise heroism in others, tells, with pardonable pride, of the exploits of his officers. One, with a ball through his arm and buried in his side, had come to announce the victory, giving no sign of his condition; another was borne, mortally wounded, to make his adieus to his general, with the words "*Vive la République!*" on his lips. Kleber himself must have felt a lonely man that night. "In the days of October 15 and 17 I lost in my division alone," he wrote, "fourteen chiefs of brigade, chiefs of battalion, or officers of my staff—all of them my friends and comrades at Mayence. . . ." He concludes with a short scornful notice of the general commanding-in-chief. "If in this account of the battle nothing is said of General Léchelle and his acolyte Robert, it is because no one can be certain that they saw them."

It was ten o'clock. The long day had been spent in fighting, the evening in pursuit. Yet it was determined by a detachment of the republicans which found itself half-way between Chollet and Beaupréau to march without loss of time upon the latter. It was true they had no more cartridges, but Beaupuy was in command, and when the objection was raised his answer was ready.

"Have you no bayonets?" he asked. "What do grenadiers want more?"

The advance was made in silence. The precaution was unnecessary. At the approach of the Blues the

town was evacuated, and was left, with the provisions and munitions of war stored in it, in the hands of the enemy.

Chollet was crowded with wounded republicans, with famished soldiers seeking food and clothes wherewith to replace their rags. And through the streets Kleber rode at the head of his staff, attended by the representatives of the people, "reassuring, by gesture and voice, all who seemed to fear him, and preventing, as much as in him lay, all vengeance and massacre." [1]

[1] *Gellesseau Amaury.*

CHAPTER XVI

October

The passage of the Loire—The prisoners saved by Bonchamps—His death—The army crosses the river.

Perhaps no chapter of the story of the Vendean war is so full of pathos as that which tells the history of the days following the republican victory at Chollet.

A hasty consultation was held at Beaupréau on the night after the battle, and again the leaders were divided in opinion. Some—La Rochejacquelein chief amongst them—would have ventured upon a fresh attack, hoping to take the enemy unawares. Stofflet was in favour of disbanding the army for the moment, and of carrying on a species of guerilla warfare. Donnissan, the chevalier Desessarts, and others were bent upon crossing the Loire—it has, indeed, been asserted that, in concert with Talmont, they had prepared for this step without the authorisation of the chiefs. The matter was taken out of the hands of the leaders—those that were left of them. Had they decided against the abandonment of the town it would not have been in their power to retain the troops at their posts. There is a point beyond which authority cannot be strained, and whilst the question of the course to be pursued was being earnestly debated by the generals, the soldiers whom they believed to be camped around Beaupréau were hurrying in crowds towards the river. Already the road to the Loire was thronged by men, women, and

children, moved by a common impulse to seek safety on the opposite shore. To stay them would have been a hopeless endeavour.

And of the chiefs who had so often led them to victory, who remained? At Beaupréau the final severance took place between d'Elbée and his army. Mortally wounded, the commander-in-chief had been removed from the town and lay in hiding in a farm hard by, from whence he was shortly to be carried by a faithful escort and placed under Charette's protection. As Beauvais took leave of his chief he asked what orders he left? Was Beaupréau to be defended?

"Where else could we go?" was the answer of the wounded leader. "I see nothing better to be done."

From first to last he had been consistent in his opposition to the step now to be taken, but the days when his voice might have availed to prevent it were over.

Bonchamps, also a dying man, had mounted his horse and striven to take his accustomed place. It was a vain effort; he was forced to permit his soldiers to bear him towards Saint-Florent. Lescure, too, who had roused himself to discuss with La Rochejacquelein what it were best to do, had been swept along with the rest. The army had determined on its course. The Loire was to be crossed and shelter sought in friendly Brittany.

The way thither was open. Talmont had taken care of that, diverting, in the opinion of some writers, to the purpose of securing it, men and munitions sorely needed for the supreme struggle at Chollet. Crossing the river at Saint-Florent, he had made

himself master of Varades, on the northern side of the Loire, and was there awaiting the issue of the battle upon which so much hung. Before the generals had reached the shore some 80,000 persons had gathered there. On the flat level sands dividing the heights of Saint-Florent, at low tide, from the broad flowing river, a multitude was crowded, made up of soldiers whole and wounded, women, children, old men—all fugitives, all looking for deliverance on the other side of the water, the misery of the situation emphasised by the fact that these were Vendeans with whom love of home, of familiar scenes, of the district in which they had been born and bred, amounted to something like an obsession. It was these men and women, to whom the outside world had ever been a place unknown and dreaded, who were driven, in their terror and desolation, to regard it as their sole haven of refuge. Behind them was nothing but smouldering ruins amidst which death lay in wait for them. The unknown country itself was better. From every quarter fresh bodies of fugitives were pouring in. At any moment the Blues might be upon them, and the means of transport were few—no more at first than some score of boats, sometimes manned by Breton priests, engaged, slowly and laboriously, in conveying over those of the expectant throng who could find a place in them. It was not strange that to the minds of some spectators of that scene of fear, confusion, and bewilderment, of that waiting multitude uncertain of its fate, the thought of another river and another passage should have been present, and that pictures of the Last Judgment should have recurred to their memory.

Even now the majority of the responsible chiefs had followed the flying army to Saint-Florent with the hope of preventing what they considered a fatal measure, of reorganising the troops, and leading them back to confront the enemy again in their own country. Amongst those who spent themselves in a last endeavour to effect their purpose La Rochejacquelein was foremost. He had followed what has been described as the *convoi funèbre* with despair in his heart. However it might have been with others, he was too young to have abandoned hope, and in spite of the past six months was no more than a boy. With others of the officers, he went to the house to which Lescure had been carried, and related to him, with tears of passion, what was going on in the plain below. He himself, he declared, would stay and be killed in La Vendée. Lescure, also, was moved to sorrow and indignation.

"Were I not wounded," he is said to have cried, "I would have stabbed the first royalist who attempted to cross the Loire, had it been the Prince de Talmont himself."[1] Forestier, too, pointed out that the resources of Brittany, which could alone give the move a chance of success, had been known to none but Bonchamps, and only his leadership could have justified the present measure. Others, nevertheless, thought differently and believed that, once out of sight of their burning homes, the courage of the peasants might revive. It was at all events certain that no power on earth could keep them at the present moment south of the Loire.

A glance at the river was sufficient to prove the

[1] *La Vendée patriote*, Chassin. Quoted from the MS of Mercier du Rocher.

truth of what was said. On the one shore were the terrified crowds; on the other, the Breton country folk, pitiful, and eager to receive and welcome the fugitives, had gathered.

"Come over to us, friends," they cried; "you shall want for nothing, . . ." and the unfortunate wayfarers, only too anxious to respond to the invitation, were waiting, each his opportunity, to accept the proffered hospitality.

Before them lay the river, divided by an island into two channels. The one on the left was comparatively narrow, and so shallow as to be fordable at low tide; the stream north of the island could only be crossed by boat. The transit could be but slow.

Meantime, at the very moment that the measure Bonchamps had urged, though in a modified degree—when he had desired to test, with his own division, the disposition of Brittany—was being carried into effect, he had reached Saint-Florent, a dying man, and the army was to be deprived, not alone of the leader who was considered by many to be its most able general, but of the chief most fitted to direct its movements north of the Loire. His last act was to be an act of mercy and pity.

"We met on the road," writes Kleber, "more than 4,000 prisoners. Nothing was more touching than the sight of these melancholy victims, pallid and disfigured, crying from afar, with scarcely audible voices, '*Vive la République!*' We learnt that they had escaped death through the intercession of Bonchamps, who, dying of his wounds, had asked and obtained mercy for them." [1]

[1] M. Deniau is of opinion that the prisoners met by Kleber were not those released at Saint-Florent, but another body of captives,

More particulars are supplied by other writers. As the crowd was massed upon the semicircular plain below Saint-Florent in momentary expectation of death, should the republican troops arrive, and with their chiefs dying before their eyes, a sudden thrill ran through the multitude. News had reached them of the arrival of 4,500 prisoners brought from Chollet, from whence they had been removed on the evacuation of the town, under the escort of its stern old commandant, d'Argognes, chevalier of St. Louis. Several had been shot in consequence of their attempts to escape, and more would have been slain, had not Madame de Bonchamps, accompanying the column, interposed in their favour. The question was what should be done with this dangerous body of men, since it was not possible to carry them across the Loire and provide them with food. Leaving them under guard in the church, d'Argognes had come to ask instructions from the generals. His opinion was that they should be put to death; and many of the officers concurred in his view. To release them was to furnish the enemy with fresh troops; to keep them captives was impossible.

The consultation had been held in the room where Lescure lay, silenced by pain, yet conscious of what was going on.

"*C'est une horreur*," he murmured, as he listened to the proposal.

who had been left in confinement at Beaupréau, and had been set at liberty on the arrival of the republican troops. A smaller number, dispatched from Chollet the previous night in another direction, and who had made their escape, are said by M. Chassin to have been recaptured, and many of them killed.

Outside, voices were heard. They were those of the crowd. In their misery, the brute had got the better of the man, and they were thirsting for blood.

"*Tuons les Bleus!*" was the cry.

The group within hesitated. No one would be the first to prescribe the massacre. No one would undertake its performance. Again Lescure spoke.

"*Je respire*—I breathe again," he said.

Nevertheless the crime would have been accomplished, whether with or without the sanction of the leaders, had it not been for the intervention of another chief, who spoke from the very vestibule of death.

Reports had reached Bonchamps of what was passing, and he gathered up his strength to make an effort to save the threatened victims. As d'Autichamp bent to receive his final instructions, he spoke.

"*Mon ami*," he said, "let those unhappy men be spared. It is the last order I shall give you. Let me have the assurance that it will be executed. . . . If you will not obey me, I declare to you that I will have myself carried into the midst of my prisoners and that your first blows shall be struck at me."

He need have had no fear. Dying, his word was still law. D'Autichamp left the chamber of death; with beating of drums he called attention to a proclamation, and, himself in tears, communicated their general's message to his soldiers. The effect was instantaneous. Affection for the leader they were losing was a force strong enough to cause them to forgo the vengeance they had meditated. The cry "*Tuons les Bleus!*" was exchanged for another.

"*Grâce, grâce!*" cried the crowd. "Let us save the prisoners. Bonchamps wishes it, Bonchamps

CHARLES MELCHIOR ARTUS, MARQUIS DE BONCHAMPS.

From an engraving by M. F. Dien.

orders it"; and the republicans were set free to go whither they would.

Not long after, when Bonchamps' wife and child were captured and brought prisoners to Nantes, the memory of this day was powerful enough to protect them in that city of blood. They were accorded military honours and no hurt was done them.

The passage of the river was proceeding as speedily as the miserable means of transport permitted. Even La Rochejacquelein had been compelled to admit that there was no alternative; even Lescure, half unconscious, had consented to be transported across. With a slight return of vigour Bonchamps had reached the opposite side alive, and lay in the fisherman's cabin to which he had been borne.

There he received the last Sacraments from the hands of M. Courgeon, priest of the Chapelle-Saint-Florent and his own old friend.

"I dare to count upon God's mercy," he said with humble confidence. "I have acted neither from pride, nor for the sake of obtaining a reputation rendered null and void by eternity. I have not fought for earthly glory. I desired to overthrow the sanguinary tyranny of crime and impiety. If I have not been able to raise up again the altars and the throne, I have at least defended them. I have served God, my King, and my country, and I have known how to forgive. . . . I count," he murmured, later on, his mind recurring to the scene on the opposite bank—"I count upon the mercy shown to the prisoners."

At eleven o'clock that night—it was October 18—the day after the disastrous battle of Chollet—he passed away, at the age of thirty-three, and was buried by torchlight in the churchyard at Varades.

Placed on a mattress, Lescure was conveyed through the crowd at Saint-Florent, and embarked, with his wife, her father, her little child, and some servants, in a boat, in which he was rowed over to the island in the middle of the river. Arrived there, it was impossible to induce the boatman who had brought the party so far, either by threats or entreaties, to go farther.

"I am a poor priest," he explained at length when Donnissan would have drawn his sword upon him, "come out of charity to ferry the Vendeans over." He was wearied out, an unexpert rower, and would run the risk of drowning his passengers should he attempt the broader crossing to the northern bank. In the end a landing was made upon the island, where a more skilled mariner was found who conveyed the forlorn party in safety to Varades.

Means of transport for the whole of the multitude were obtained. At the head of a body of volunteers, Piron, Lyrot, and Talmont had descended the Loire as far as Ancenis, attacked the town, mastered the garrison, and obtained possession of the ships lying there at anchor; being thus enabled first to carry over a fraction of the artillery which had been brought from Beaupréau to the right side of the Loire—the guns perforce left behind being most of them spiked or thrown into the river; and, almost incredible though it seems, some 80,000 persons, including 20,000 aged people, women, and children, were taken to the opposite bank during one day and two nights.

The work had only been accomplished just in time, and a few laggards still remained on the shore when the members of the Convention, Merlin and

Boursault, with some hundreds of horsemen, reached Saint-Florent.

"I am come too late to drown the remainder of the rebels," wrote Merlin to the Committee of Public Safety. "This army of the Pope . . . has again escaped us." And he urged that a proclamation should be issued, pointing to Lyons razed to the ground, La Vendée in ashes, and the country flooded with the blood of traitors. He also, communicating the fact of the amnesty accorded to the prisoners, strongly recommended silence on this point. For free men to accept life at the hands of slaves was not revolutionary. "This unhappy incident must therefore be buried in forgetfulness; do not mention it even to the Convention. It will be forgotten like so much else."

In the country left behind by the Grande Armée the policy of extermination, by fire and sword, was ruthlessly executed. At Beaupréau men, women, and children were indiscriminately slaughtered, and the wounded found in the town, to the number of seven or eight hundred, were put to death.

Thus the memorable passage of the Loire was made by the remnant of the Grande Armée. Panic and terror had possession of the helm, and the vessel was launched in unknown waters. No more than a small proportion of those who crossed the river were ever to return to the homes they loved so well.

CHAPTER XVII

October

La Rochejacquelein made commander-in-chief—Republican hopes—Noirmoutiers captured by Charette—D'Elbée takes refuge with him—The Grande Armée starts for Laval—Order of the march—Laval reached.

In the disorganised and demoralised condition of the army, it was of urgent importance to lose no time in appointing a commander-in-chief who might apply himself to bringing order out of chaos. D'Elbée had disappeared, carrying his death-wound no one at first knew whither. Bonchamps, his natural successor, was dead—his death being worth, as a republican dispatch acknowledged, as much as a battle won. If Lescure might possibly be able, at some future date, to take the position he was well fitted to fill, for the present he could do nothing. Who remained? It might have been expected that birth and tradition would have pointed to the Prince de Talmont; but his nomination does not seem to have been so much as in question. Donnissan, brave and true, had no desire for the post, nor did he belong to the province—a matter of the first importance in the eyes of the peasants he would have led. One man stood out amongst the rest—Henri de La Rochejacquelein.

To the generals and officers who gathered round Lescure's sick-bed, and who would have had him, despite his present condition, assume the name of

commander-in-chief, he spoke in plain terms. He believed himself, he said, to have received his mortal wound. Were he to live—which he did not look upon as possible—he would still be long incapable of taking command. A chief was necessary at once, and one loved and trusted by all. La Rochejacquelein was the only man known to every division of the army, and he counselled and entreated that he should be placed at the head of it.

"As for me, if I live," he added, "you know I shall not quarrel with Henri. I shall be his aide de camp."

Lescure's advice was taken, and La Rochejacquelein appointed.

To Henri the burden was a heavy one. A gallant soldier, he had never aspired to be in command. "Why do they want me to be a general?" he had often complained. "I am too young, and only care for fighting." And now that he was, not only to be general, but commander-in-chief, the prospect appalled him, bringing home doubtless, to his mind, the havoc wrought amongst his friends and leaders, when a lad of twenty-one was chosen for a post of such responsibility.

"As soon as M. de Lescure knew they had acted on his advice," writes his wife, "he told me to call Henri. He had hidden himself in a corner and was crying bitterly. I brought him in. He threw his arms round M. de Lescure's neck, repeating that he was not fit to be general—that he only knew how to fight, that he was much too young, and that he should never know how to silence those who opposed him. He begged M. de Lescure to take the command as soon as he should have recovered."

The whole scene demonstrates the extreme youth of the boy beside whom Lescure, himself no more than twenty-seven, seems a man taught by age and experience of life, expecting and ready to be leant upon. Yet, young as he was, La Rochejacquelein was to show himself worthy, in the short time that remained to him, of the confidence of his comrades.

Joly-Crétineau draws an interesting comparison between "Monsieur Henri," the light-hearted, irresponsible soldier of fortune, the knight-errant in search of adventure, and the man he became, charged with the care of the army. Developing a maturity of character wholly new, he learnt to put a restraint upon his daring; to refrain from going forth to seek danger, since danger to him was danger to the troops he commanded; and became grave and thoughtful as befitted one upon whom the fate of thousands hung.

It may have been well that the leaders in La Vendée were largely recruited from the ranks of the young; for to men who had not the elasticity, the indomitable hopefulness, belonging to youth, it must have been difficult to keep alive the sanguine spirit alone rendering a desperate enterprise possible.

To some men on the opposite side it appeared that the battle of Chollet had practically put an end to the war. "Merlin and his colleagues," says Kleber, "always taking an exaggerated view, wrote, perhaps from motives of policy, to the Committee of Public Safety and to the Convention: '*Vive la République!* the Vendean war is at an end!' . . . Alas, it had done no more than shift its scene."

It was doubtless the interest of politicians and generals alike to lay undue stress upon the republican

success, and also to convince the central authorities that the measures of wholesale destruction of life and property stringently enjoined by the Committee of Public Safety had been carried out to their utmost limit. The unreliability of reports intended to answer this purpose—documents, to quote Kleber again, "*dégoûtans de mensonge*"—adds no little to the difficulty of estimating the situation aright.

In a paper addressed to the Committee by the representatives in the west it was stated that "a profound solitude is actually reigning in the country occupied by the rebels. . . . You might go far in these districts without meeting with a man or a cottage; for with the exception of Chollet, Saint-Florent, and some small towns, where the number of patriots largely exceed that of the counter-revolutionists, we have left behind us only ashes and heaps of corpses."

Were this a true description of the province as a whole, the insurrection in the districts in question might have been considered on the way to be extinct; but judging by the accounts of men like Savary and Kleber such reports can have applied to a portion of the Vendean territory alone. It was a day when men prided themselves upon barbarity, and boasted of it as if it were a virtue. That a large part of the insurgent district had been burnt is abundantly proved; it was this—"our customary manner of lighting our march"—that had driven masses of the Vendean peasantry across the Loire. The central portions of the Bocage nevertheless were still unexplored by the republican troops; whilst bodies of men were collecting on the left of the Loire, and fragments of the Grande Armée not included in

the general exodus were raising the white flag under chiefs of their own. Pierre Cathelineau, brother of the dead general, had 1,500 men under his command, and was acting as body-guard to the wounded d'Elbée.

That Merlin was not so confident as he wished to appear in the speedy termination of the war is indicated by his proposal that "*le département vengé*," as he would have had the district rechristened, should be made over to Germans or poor labourers on condition that all hedges and ditches were destroyed. Another representative—one Fayau—desired that an incendiary body should over-run the parts of the country not already laid waste, and ensure that, for a year at least, neither man nor beast should there find subsistence. The project was approved at head quarters. "*Il faut désoler jusqu'à leur patience*," said Barère.

In Lower Vendée a triumph had been won. On October 12—a week before the battle of Chollet—Charette, intent on his personal schemes to the neglect of the duties of comradeship, had by a bold stroke gained possession of the island of Noirmoutiers, taken the garrison prisoners, and seized all the munitions of war stored there. It was after this brilliant exploit that he heard, at Machecoul, of the disaster that had befallen the Grande Armée, the tidings coming to dash his legitimate satisfaction at his success. It is said that, as he learnt the melancholy sequel of his abandonment of his brothers-in-arms, remorse laid hold upon him.

"I have perhaps been wrong," he said, "not to have sacrificed all to go to their help."

It was, however, not a time for men fighting under the same banner to cherish resentment; and d'Elbée,

wounded and defeated, when he met the leader of Lower Vendée, had no reproaches to make the man who had failed him at need.

"I come," he said, "to throw myself into your arms."

"Your life belongs to La Vendée," was Charette's reply. "Need I say that I will defend it"; and it was arranged that d'Elbée should retire to Noirmoutiers, as a place of comparative safety, and there, if it were possible, recover from his wound.[1]

Meantime, on the right bank of the Loire it was essential to decide rapidly on future action. To provide for the vast mass of fugitives accompanying the army for more than a few days at any one spot was clearly impossible, were the resources of the hospitable Bretons to be taxed to the utmost. When the direction to be taken was under consideration, opinions, as usual, differed. Lescure, assisting at the Council at a cost of strength rendering him afterwards almost insensible, was in favour of marching upon Nantes, and so approaching Charette's centre of action. Others deprecated a second attack on a place associated with failure. In the end Rennes was selected as the goal to be aimed at, a start being made at once towards Ingrande.

Before the melancholy journey began, the news of Marie Antoinette's execution reached the camp, causing some of the men to feel, in their sorrow and indignation, that, even should unexpected success crown their efforts, their labour would have been in vain. As the soldiers who had fought for the Queen and her son heard of the rejoicings at Nantes—of

[1] It was there that, a dying man, he was executed when the island was recaptured by the republicans some months later.

illuminations and dancing in honour of the event—it was no wonder that vows of vengeance were made.

The order in which the march was taken has been described by Madame de La Rochejacquelein. First came the vanguard, preserving some sort of order, commanded by young Forestier and accompanied by a certain amount of artillery. Then followed a mixed, closely packed multitude, composed of soldiers, old men, women and children, with cartloads of sick, baggage, and furniture. No discipline could be maintained, the throng being so dense that it was scarcely possible to force a way through it. The procession covered altogether some four leagues in length. Behind came the rearguard, and, under its escort, the unfortunate Lescures—a forlorn group including the wounded man, hardly able to endure the agony caused by motion, his wife, her baby, Madame de Donnissan, and her aged sister. To add to the general misery, rain was falling heavily and incessantly as the army moved on, the only certainty being that to halt where it was, unprovided with means of defence, would be to yield itself a helpless prey to the enemy upon its track.

Reading the description of this ambulant mass of humanity, destitute of almost all the necessaries of life and war, the victories the Grande Armée was yet to win over ordered and disciplined troops come near to being incredible.

The march was directed towards Laval, Ingrande, Candé, Segré, and Château Gonthier being taken on the way. Talmont, descended from the overlords of a large part of Brittany, cherished hopes that a general rising of local royalists would quickly swell the numbers of the army. The Abbé Bernier con-

curred in his view; and there was also a revival of hope of assistance from England, consequent upon the arrival of a fresh emissary from Jersey, bringing promises of aid. This messenger—an *emigré* named Saint-Hilaire—had reached Saint-Florent at the time when the passage of the Loire was in progress, and had been the bearer of a document laying bare the fraud perpetrated by the sham Bishop of Agra. Whether the brief sent from Rome to unveil the imposture was in response to inquiries set on foot by Bernier, or whether independent rumours had reached the Vatican, the Pope made it known that the story told had been false throughout. It remained to deal as judiciously as possible with a difficult situation. It has been a matter of reproach to the royalist leaders that they did not at once make the deception that had been practised public, and this would undoubtedly have been the more straightforward course. In Bernier's opinion, however, the priesthood would have been thereby compromised, and it was determined that the impostor should, instead, be gradually discountenanced—which was the less difficult as his influence was on the decline. An open explanation was thereby avoided, and a public scandal averted. The disgraced man appears quickly to have been made aware that his imposture had been detected and to have become in consequence the prey of deep melancholy.

The march to Laval was accomplished on the whole uneventfully. Candé, Segré, Château Gonthier, were successively occupied, with occasional skirmishes and the tragedies inseparable from a progress of the kind. On some occasions—notably at Château Gonthier—

the wounded, left behind for want of means of transport, were found to have been killed by the Blues, and reprisals followed. Marigny more than once executed what he would have called justice with his own hands on men notorious for their republican views and ferocity.

"No officer followed his example," says Madame de La Rochejacquelein, "but they no longer opposed his acts of vengeance"—a significant admission.

Surrounded by enemies, and with the dreaded Mayençais behind—they too had crossed the Loire and were coming closer at every stage of the march—alarms, false or true, could not fail to be frequent. On one occasion the sight of three hussars—in reality fugitives—caused the cry that the enemy were upon them; and Lescure, collecting his wandering senses, demanded a gun and craved to be permitted to leave his carriage and face the Blues once more. As the army approached Laval an effort was made by the representative Esnüe-Lavallée to arrest its march. Fifteen thousand national guards had been collected from towns in the neighbourhood, and on October 23 a fight took place, resulting in the complete defeat of the Blues. It was a fight that might easily have cost La Rochejacquelein his life. Finding himself alone for the moment during the pursuit of the fugitives and riding down a hollow lane, his right arm disabled and carried in a sling, he was attacked by a republican soldier. Catching the man by the collar with his left hand, he contrived, with the help of his horse, to keep him at bay till his own soldiers, coming to the rescue, would have killed his assailant on the spot. Henri forbade it.

"Go back to the republicans," he said, "and tell

them you were alone with the chief of the brigands, that he had only one hand and no weapon, and that you could not kill him."

On the arrival of the troops at Laval, La Rochejacquelein again showed that, whatever might be the case with others, he had not learnt in the school of civil war that forgiveness is a weakness if not a crime. The royalists, on their entry into the town, had been roused to fierce indignation at a shot, fired after the fight was over, which, killing an officer close beside him, was believed by the soldiers to have been directed at their young commander. The cry of "No quarter!" was raised and the slaughter had begun, when a woman belonging to the town sought La Rochejacquelein to beg for mercy for the intended victims. His answer was prompt.

"It was I, madame, upon whom they fired," he said. "Therefore I should be the first to forgive," and the men were spared.

And thus the Grande Armée entered Laval.

CHAPTER XVIII

October

Republican proclamations—Defeat of Westermann—Léchelle's ineptitude—Battle and victory of Laval—La Rochejacquelein as general—Léchelle's retirement and death—Kleber in command.

Laval had been reached. The remnant of the Grande Armée had been snatched from destruction; but the enemy, flushed with victory, was on its track, and to many, both of victors and vanquished, it must have seemed that the end was simply postponed, and a respite only had been wrung from the hands of fate.

One of the most astonishing events that marked a war from first to last full of surprises was yet to come. For an army like that taking refuge in Laval, demoralised and dispirited by a crushing defeat, deprived of most of its loved and trusted leaders, in a country with which it was not acquainted, exhausted by a long march, suffering from privation and want of all kinds, and depending as its commander-in-chief upon a boy of twenty-one—for such an army to gather up its strength in the space of two days so as to be capable of striking a blow at the victorious troops in its pursuit, and of gaining a brilliant victory over them, might well have seemed out of the range of possibility. Yet this was to be the result of the battle of Laval.

Victory or death were the sole alternatives—so much was certain. In case of failure no mercy was to be looked for. Had it been necessary to

bring this fact home more emphatically to the minds of the Vendean soldiers than had been done by recent events in their own country, a proclamation addressed to their Breton hosts by the representatives in the west would have answered the purpose.

"The Vendean brigands"—so it ran—"beaten and put to flight by the soldiers of the Republic, have crossed the Loire. They are about to carry into your district the scourges they spread abroad in a country of which they believed themselves to be masters, and which is now a mere heap of ashes and corpses. Such will be your fate if you do not use all your strength to drive out the monsters bringing death and desolation into your territory. We are ceaselessly pursuing this horrible horde. Hasten to oppose impenetrable barriers to its advance. Let us march together. Let us drown in the Loire and exterminate upon its shores the remnants of the Catholic and Royal Army."

A second proclamation enjoined respect upon the republican soldiers for the lives and property of the Bretons, assumed to be loyal to the Republic—a measure doubtless politic under the circumstances, when a general royalist rising on the north of the Loire was at all costs to be averted. The Bretons, though in full sympathy with their guests, had been so successfully terrorised that the open support they had hitherto offered to the fugitives had been of no great moment. Some 6,000 young men, distinguished from the rest of the troops by their goatskins and their long hair, had come to join the Vendeans, Jean Cottereau, better known as Jean Chouan, among them; but the mass of the population was quiescent, fearing to yield themselves victims to the vengeance

that would overtake them when the Grande Armée should have passed on and the Republic have resumed its sway. Talmont's hopes of a general rising had proved signally delusive.

The Vendeans were, however, for the moment, sufficient to themselves.

They had had two days' start of the enemy—days passed in giving the troops the rest they sorely needed. When after this short interval news was brought that the battalions commanded by Westermann, as usual in front of the main body, had reached Château Gonthier, the last stage before Laval, two courses lay open to the Grande Armée. It might either pursue its way in a march that was virtually a flight; or it might prepare to meet the republican forces once more in open fight. The last was the choice advocated by La Rochejacquelein, and he prevailed.

It was a desperate resolve; yet it was to be justified by the result. The pursuing troops consisted of some 30,000 men, including the redoubtable Mayençais. Amongst the generals was no lack of able officers who possessed the full confidence of their soldiers. Kleber was there, and Savary, Marceau, Blosse, and Beaupuy, not to speak of Westermann, vainglorious and rash, and, according to Kleber, ever in haste to further his personal ambition by obtaining glory and notoriety at the expense of common prudence. To ill-considered impetuosity on his part, in making a night assault on Laval, with troops insufficient in number and worn out by a day's march, was now due a preliminary defeat. Driven back by the Vendeans, he was forced to recognise the fact that, as Kleber sardonically observed, audacity does not in all cases suffice to ensure success.

If Westermann's foolhardiness was instrumental in giving the royalists the inspiriting sense of having once more had the upper hand, a more important asset in their favour continued to be the total incompetence of the republican commander-in-chief. The action of the men under him was crippled and paralysed, and their military skill rendered of no effect, by his directions. "You have perhaps been told," Kleber wrote afterwards to the Committee of Public Safety, "that we refused to obey Léchelle's orders. It is false. His orders were absurd; but, through subordination, we carried them out until the moment that the general-in-chief thought well to abandon the field of battle."

Notwithstanding the repulse experienced by Westermann, it was resolved, on the arrival of the main body of the republicans, that a general attack should be made without loss of time. In vain Kleber pointed out the condition of the army, exhausted by a long march and by insufficiency of provisions. No respite was to be allowed it. On October 27 the fight was to take place.

During the preceding night La Rochejacquelein had made his observations and had arrived at the conclusion that an assault was intended. At dawn his several divisions were marshalled and in order.

"Salvation lies for us in victory alone," he said, addressing the troops. "Your wives and children, driven like yourselves from your country by fire or death, are awaiting with anxiety the result of the battle. We are defending the cause of God, of the King, of all families. Vendeans, remember the defeat of Chollet. Let the day that is breaking atone for

that terrible battle and the horrors that have followed it."

Amid the general enthusiasm Lescure, who had gained strength during the two days' rest at Laval, could scarcely be prevented from mounting his horse to try one more fall with the enemy. As, from his window, he looked down on the soldiers marching past, and encouraged them by word and gesture, the cry went up, "*Vive Lescure!*" and for a moment the hope that he might again hear that shout on the field of battle may have cheered him.

And then the miracle took place.

All through October 26—the day following upon Westermann's defeat—Kleber, just arrived at Château Gonthier, had been doing all that man could do to counteract the effects of his rashness and Léchelle's inefficiency. All through that night—Léchelle was sleeping and could not be disturbed—he had been in consultation with the other generals, and had arranged a plan of operations which received, or seemed to receive, the sanction of the commander-in-chief when morning came. A few hours later orders were issued rendering these arrangements practically null and void, and substituting for them a scheme of Léchelle's own, hall-marked, as Kleber afterwards wrote, by the grossest ignorance. The troops were to march upon the enemy immediately, and in a single column. Remonstrance was vain; there was no alternative but obedience, and thus the battle began.

Almost from the first it was clear that the Vendeans had the advantage, aided by the order in which the Blues were advancing, and in spite of all that Kleber and Beaupuy—leading the vanguard, with Wester-

mann, eager to wipe out the memory of his late defeat—could do; and when Kleber, hard pressed, sent to demand support from Léchelle, who, with Chalbos' division, was in the rear, not only was reinforcement not forthcoming, but it became known that the commander-in-chief was a fugitive. "Soon," says Kleber, "the flight begins, not in my division, which was fighting, but in that of Chalbos, which was not fighting; and Léchelle—the cowardly Léchelle himself—sets the example of flight."

In front the Mayençais were nevertheless holding their ground, and balls from two of their cannon, planted on the terrace of a château near the village of Entrammes, were falling thick amongst Stofflet's troops.

"Do you want to see how Vendeans gain possession of guns?" the latter asked, addressing, with a characteristic touch of bravado, the *emigré*, Saint-Hilaire, who had joined in the fight.

Twelve horsemen dashed forward at a sign from him; the gunners were killed at their posts; the cannon was in the hands of the royalists, and was turned the next moment upon its late owners.

And everywhere where the battle was fiercest La Rochejacquelein was present, conspicuous in the blue coat he always wore, directing, encouraging, rousing greater and greater enthusiasm in his soldiers; ready, too, on occasion, to prevent them from giving way to overmuch grief at inevitable losses.

"*Mes amis*," he cried, as Royrand—one of the few older generals in the Vendean ranks—fell, mortally wounded, and he saw the men weeping for the leader they loved. "*Mes amis*, we will pray for M. de Royrand to-morrow; let us avenge him

to-day"; and there were tears in his eyes as he spoke.

The Mayençais, ever gallant, refused to own themselves beaten, and contested the ground with stubborn determination; till La Rochejacquelein with a picked body of men and guided by Jean Chouan, well acquainted with the country, surprised them from behind. Caught between two fires they were at length driven back. Talmont and Lyrot were attacking them on their left; Fleuriot in front; Stofflet, too, was charging them; and their ranks, constantly re-formed, were broken, and in a hand-to-hand fight the Vendeans were victorious. "For the first time," writes Kleber, "I see the soldiers of Mayence fly. The enemy pursues us, seizes our cannon successively, and turns it against us. Our loss in men becomes considerable."

Yet order was preserved, and from time to time they turned to fire on the pursuers, always close behind. Blosse, in command of the republican reserve, summoned to the field of battle when the rout had begun, had been forced back to Château Gonthier by the mass of fugitives, Léchelle at their head. As night fell he attempted to arrest the pursuit by placing a couple of guns in a position which commanded the bridge leading over the small river Mayenne into the town, and hoped thus to afford Kleber time to rally his men. It was in vain. Stofflet, with his sharpshooters, contrived to slip to the rear of the enemy and to cut off their retreat. Some of the Mayençais swam the river; others were drowned in it. Another battalion, recognised as having been specially prominent in carrying destruction into La Vendée and committing excesses

there, laid down its arms. The opportunity of vengeance was not permitted to pass. Stofflet, or as some say Cheton, also an Angevin officer, gave an order—La Rochejacquelein was surely absent from the scene—and the men were surrounded and slain on the spot.

With bitterness and humiliation the republican generals watched the flight.

"Come with me," said Savary to General Blosse, bareheaded and wounded. "Come and let us try to put order into the retreat."

"No," cried the other, "the shame of such a day is not to be survived," and throwing himself forward in the face of the Vendeans he fell shot through the lungs.

Beaupuy, who replaced him at the head of three regiments, was likewise struck and wounded.

"I have not been able to conquer for the Republic, but I can die for her," he cried. Carried into a cabin that his wound might be dressed, he bade those with him take his bloodstained shirt to his grenadiers, confident that the sight of it would urge them on to fresh endeavours. The Blues did in fact rally and gather themselves together for a last stand. But La Rochejacquelein was at hand.

"*Hé bien, mes amis*," he said with a smile, as he saw the men flinch before the fire directed on them from across the bridge, "are the conquerors by chance to sleep out of doors and the vanquished in the town?"

Seizing a flag, he was the first to throw himself on to the bridge. The men followed; resistance was vain, and presently Henri was bearing the white flag through the captured town. Though fighting continued for some hours, the day was won.

In the château were found the corpses of the royalist sick and wounded who had been left at the hospital, rousing the Vendeans to fresh fury; and everywhere deeds of blood ensued. Cannon was planted upon the heights commanding the road which the Blues were taking, and in the darkness the retreat became a headlong flight, destitute of any species of order, the soldiers slackening their speed only when out of hearing of the guns.[1] The triumph of the Vendeans was complete.

The battle had lasted twelve hours. La Rochejacquelein had displayed to the full the new qualities responsibility had developed, and shown himself as prudent in victory as brave in the fight. By a pursuit too rashly persisted in, the Vendeans had often forfeited the fruits of their successes. With a caution wholly foreign to his natural disposition, their young general curbed their reckless ardour, to the extent of imposing the death penalty upon any man who might be tempted to leave the ranks; with the result that his troops throughout remained a solid mass.

He had won his laurels and had proved that, not merely a gallant soldier, he possessed the qualities necessary to make a great general. Writing many years later, Jomini, the eminent military authority, stated that the battle of Laval gave "this young man a very high place in the estimation of soldiers." The letter, too, dispatched to the Committee of Public Safety by Kleber, who could afford to do justice to an antagonist, pays a generous tribute to the man by whom he had been defeated.

"The brigands," he wrote, "used unusual tactics. We had against us their admirable impetuosity and

[1] Kleber.

the impulse given to them by a young man. This young man, called Henri de La Rochejacquelein, made Generalissimo after the passage of the Loire, has won his spurs bravely. He has displayed in this unhappy battle a military science and an aplomb that we had not found in the brigands since Torfou. The Republic owes this defeat to his foresight and coolness."

Meanwhile Léchelle had reached Angers, where Kleber received orders to report himself next morning. It pleased the commander-in-chief to attribute the responsibility for the disaster to the army of Mayence.

"What have I done?" he had been heard to exclaim as, leaving the battlefield, he had withdrawn to Château Gonthier. "What have I done that I should command cowards like these?"

The words were overheard by a wounded soldier, and he took the reply upon himself.

"What have we done to be given such a general?" he retorted with pardonable insolence.

Again, when, the next morning, Léchelle was passing in review the remnant of the republican forces, brought by Kleber to Angers, a scene took place significant of the estimation in which he was held. As the two moved along the ranks a cry was raised, "*A bas Léchelle! Vive Dubayet!*"—the suspended general-in-chief of the Mayençais—"Let him be given back to us. *Vive Kleber!*" and the inspection was brought to an abrupt conclusion.

Kleber, for his part, had intended to point out to the men who loved and trusted him that they had been, in some degree, to blame for their defeat. When, however, it came to the point he had not the heart to administer the rebuke.

"Finding myself in the midst of these brave men, who had hitherto known nothing but victory"—Kleber had forgotten Torfou—"and who had so often covered themselves with glory; seeing them crowding around me, devoured by grief and shame, my own voice was smothered by sobs, I could not speak a single word, I withdrew. . . ."

As he left the camp, he met the representatives of the people.

"I am sorry," said one of them, "that the soldiers cried '*Vive Dubayet!*'"

"You should know how to make allowance for their grief and confusion," answered Kleber. "It is the first time they have fled before an enemy; they have always, till now, conquered."

"I excuse them for having apostrophised Léchelle," was the reply. "They saw him fly; he does not deserve that they should trust him. They should have stopped there."

All were agreed that Léchelle must, if only temporarily, be removed from his command. It was proposed that Kleber should provisionally replace him; but Kleber was firm in his refusal. To the argument that in him the soldiers had most confidence and that he alone would be able to restore their courage he replied that he was ready to do so without occupying his post of commander-in-chief.

"I will make them obedient to whomsoever you place at their head," he told the representatives—"even to Léchelle himself, if he does not run away again." For the rest there was a general of division, Chalbos, at hand, who added to the experience of forty years all that was necessary to inspire confidence. It would be painful to Kleber to have a man of his

JEAN BAPTISTE KLEBER.

From an engraving by Elizabeth G. Herham after a drawing by J. Guerin.

standing under his orders. If his military talents were not of the highest rank, he could be directed to take counsel with other generals if any decision of importance was to be taken.

Such was Kleber's advice, and thus it was in the end arranged. Léchelle was advised to apply for leave of absence for ostensible reasons of health, and Chalbos was to assume the command. "As soon as Léchelle heard of this arrangement," relates Kleber, "he began to cough violently. He nevertheless dined with us that same day, and had the absurd impudence to give it to be understood that this defeat was due to the gold of Pitt, by which the army of Mayence had been seduced; 'but,' he added, 'I shall unveil the conspiracy, and woe to traitors! . . . I would have spoken—they urged me to do so. Already my eyes and my gesture had made my meaning plain. But every one having a smile of contempt on their lips, what remained for me to say?'"

Taking the only course open to him, Léchelle applied for leave on the score of health in a letter to the Minister of War which, whilst acknowledging the disaster, added that the former garrison of Mayence had demanded their general, Dubayet, loudly, thus proving that he did not possess their confidence. It is noticeable that in marked contrast to the treatment of other unsuccessful generals by the Government, no disapprobation was shown of Léchelle. "We are all thoroughly persuaded," wrote the Minister, "that you have not been in fault, and that you will do all in your power to repair this misfortune. . . . Neglect no means of recovering [your health] rapidly. Try also to make known to me all traitors and intriguers,

and to place them in the hands of the military tribunal."

Léchelle's response was prompt. Reiterating the expression of his devotion to the Republic, he wrote that grief at seeing his country sacrificed to base jealousies made it impossible for him, for the moment, to direct the military operations. His holiday would end the instant he could offer new proofs of his devotion. In the meantime he would lose no opportunity of making known to the Minister the traitors and intriguers who were endangering the safety of the Republic.

Thus Léchelle disappears from the scene of the war, repairing to Nantes, where not more than a fortnight later he died, having, as some have believed, put an end to his life by poison.[1]

[1] For the account of the battle I am largely indebted to M. Deniau. On one republican officer, General Danican, a grave suspicion of treachery rests; and M. Chassin is of opinion that foul play on his part may have contributed to the royalist success. See *La Vendée patriote.*

CHAPTER XIX

November

Divided counsels—Dissensions—Talmont—Lack of means—Republican methods—The royalist march—Fougères—Lescure's death—Breton recruits.

The battle won, the question how to turn it to the best advantage was next to be considered. On this point opinions as usual differed; and La Rochejacquelein, efficient as he had proved in the matter of military command, was too young, too little confident in his judgment, to exercise a determining influence on the Council.

Personally, he was in favour of following the republican troops to Angers before they had had time to recover from their defeat, and by this means to open a way to La Vendée and lead the army back to renew the fight on its native soil. That his instinct was a true one is shown by the arguments used by Kleber at a council of war held on the day after the battle with the object of inducing the authorities to grant the republican troops a brief period of repose. Invited to give his reasons, he spoke plainly. The first question to be asked, he said, was whether or not an army existed. That question would have been answered had those he was addressing visited, like himself, the camp before dawn and had seen the wretched condition of the soldiers and heard them cry, "The cowards are at Angers, and we are here in misery." Like him, they would then see

that nothing could be undertaken till the army was reorganised and placed on a new footing, morally and physically. A few days at Angers would produce this effect.

Something of this La Rochejacquelein may have divined. Lescure, too, was urgent that the army should not be led away from the Loire, and thus lose its chance of regaining La Vendée. But other counsels prevailed. The young commander-in-chief yielded against his better judgment to those—Talmont at their head—who counted upon raising Brittany; and, reluctantly leaving Château Gonthier, he retraced his steps, and rejoined the main body of the troops, who had returned to Laval after the battle.

Safety for the present had been secured; and when an encounter with a fresh body of republicans took place at Craon, not far from Laval, the town was taken by storm. The streets were found strewn with royalist prisoners, slaughtered, in spite of the protests of the generals in command, by the orders of the representative Esnüe Lavallée, before the evacuation of the town; and in anger and grief the Vendeans imitated the evil example set them, and gave no quarter.

A rest of some days had been decided upon at Laval, where a rearrangement of troops was effected. Many gaps were to be filled; many duties redistributed. The fighting strength of the army has been estimated at 40,000, of which only 1,000 were cavalry; of these some were old men, some children serving their apprenticeship as soldiers. A military council, presided over by the marquis de Donnissan, was to replace the Superior Council which, at Châtillon, had discharged its functions so

ill. The Abbé Bernier, who had been its moving spirit, remained a member of the new body and was made Chaplain-General of the army.

At this moment, even to men not prone to indulge in over-sanguine hopes, success might again have seemed possible. Had England intervened, had Brittany risen *en masse* as La Vendée had done, who could have foretold the result? But at this very time, when vigorous and united action was above all things essential, the absence of a powerful chief, a controlling force that might have put an end to dissensions and made the army once again of one mind and heart, was to be disastrously felt. Disintegrating elements, jealousy, insubordination, were doing their fatal work; La Rochejacquelein, handicapped by his youth and by his consciousness of it, was powerless to control or exercise constraint over older men. Uncertainty and indecision paralysed action and robbed the Vendeans of the fruits of their victories. There must have been many who longed for the presence of Cathelineau, Bonchamps, Sapinaud, Royrand, or d'Elbée—men who would have known how to assert their authority and restore discipline and order.

Talmont, though brave and true and indulging little personal ambition, was made a tool of by stronger men. At Laval he was on the territory of his brother, the Duc de la Trémoille, to whom the Breton royalists owed allegiance. Assuming the airs of royalty, he introduced whom he would into the Council, and held a species of court at the château, surrounded by flatterers and the lighter-minded amongst the officers.

To Lescure La Rochejacquelein would report his difficulties and seek his counsel. But to deal with

the disorganising forces at work or to act upon the advice he received was often beyond his power. Lescure himself could only chafe at his helplessness and give way, in his weakness, to fits of passion foreign to his nature. "I remember once," writes his wife, "that the complaints made by M. de Beauvolliers of M. de Talmont's conduct so transported M. de Lescure that he would have liked to go to the Council and to shoot the Prince."

On some occasions hot disputes took place between the young commander-in-chief and Talmont.

"I understand your peasants better than you do," Talmont told La Rochejacquelein, when Henri pointed out the impossibility of a march upon Paris, burdened as the army was with a mass of women, children, and wounded.

"Prince," replied La Rochejacquelein, "when I wish to learn to understand the *filles* of Paris I will ask you for information; when it is a question of the peasants of Poitou I know more about them than you." [1]

No doubt the boast, if boast it can be called, was justified. Yet the man upon whom so much depended, and who nevertheless lacked the authority conferred by age and experience, may have been driven almost to despair as he gradually grasped the full nature of the situation with which he had to grapple, and what might be the results of a blunder or a false step on his part.

The disunion amongst the leaders must have gravely increased the difficulties—already sufficiently great—of conducting the campaign. One of the most pressing of these was the lack of the necessary

[1] *Mémoires de Madame de La Rochejacquelein.*

funds. The method adopted by the republicans—that of simply claiming, in the name of the government, what was wanted—did not find favour with the royalist chiefs, and it was proposed to issue a certain amount of paper money in the name of the King, the royal exchequer, in case of victory, being made responsible for payment. The more efficient system of simply exacting what was demanded by the exigencies of the situation was rejected. Pillage was strictly forbidden and was more than once punished by death.

It was clear that for one of the contending parties to indulge in honourable scruples was to put it at a disadvantage confronted by an antagonist who, rightly or wrongly, regarded these scruples as a luxury.

"We learn"—so ran a circular issued by the representatives Prieur and Turreau to the western districts on November 4—"that in your cantons the inhabitants are not bleeding themselves with enthusiasm for the nation. The Committee of Public Safety holds you responsible for this apathy. . . . We execute its views with truly revolutionary vigour. You have not to do with those fools of honest men who lose the game they have won because their stupid uprightness does not know how to hold the cards. We wish to do the people good, in spite of the people. They must be constrained to be free, and you alone can compass this end. Force them to make sacrifices. . . . We have need of men, munitions, equipments, horses, above all, money. Twenty-four hours after the reception of this letter you will supply the Republic with what she exacts through us, or the measures you have not applied to others will be applied to you."

Pressure such as is here described was not unsuccessful. On November 11 the representatives wrote in triumph to the Convention, "Our magnificent work has succeeded beyond all desires and all revolutionary hopes. The voice of the people has been heard. The country has an army, subsidies, munitions. . . ."

Carrier, at Nantes, had had other methods to suggest for use in combating the royalist reaction. These were explained in a letter of November 9 addressed to his colleagues and to the generals. Poison was, in his opinion, more certain in its effects than artillery. Let the springs be poisoned. Let bread be poisoned and left where it would be found and seized by the brigands. "You have spies amongst these soldiers of the Pope, led by a child. Make them this gift and the country is saved. You kill La Rochejacquelein's soldiers with the bayonet. Kill them with arsenic—it is cheaper and more convenient. . . ."

As Kleber heard the suggestion he cried out with indignation.

"Were Carrier here," he said, "I would run him through the body."

"Nevertheless, something must be done," observed the representative Prieur.

"Yes," answered Kleber; "the brigands must be fought to the death, not to infamy. If this discussion continues, citizens," he added, "I withdraw"; and his brother officers were in full agreement with him. Carrier's methods were not in harmony with those of the Mayençais.[1]

Meantime, the future course of the royalist army remained undetermined. The road backwards had

[1] Joly-Crétineau, who does not state his authority.

been closed behind them during their time of hesitation—that opportunity had been lost. Brittany, or Normandy, with a view of ultimately reaching Paris, were the present alternatives; and Brittany—especially the department of Morbihan—was showing itself more and more eager to give the Grande Armée a welcome. If promises of support were vague, they were cheering. A letter purporting to come from M. de Puisaye had reached Laval, stating that 50,000 men were prepared to rise in the neighbourhood of Rennes, and their chiefs desired a passport, in order that they might come to confer with the Vendean generals. In the absence of the other leaders it fell to Lescure, ill as he was, to open the missive; and some doubts were entertained as to its genuineness. No written answer was therefore returned, La Rochejacquelein merely replying verbally to the messenger that, the army being no more than twelve leagues from Rennes, the 50,000 rebels might come forward, and no passport would be necessary. After much discussion it was decided that a move should be made toward Fougères, from whence either Rennes might be approached, or an attempt be made to seize a seaport and open communications with England.

The army started on its march towards Rennes after three days spent at Laval, Mayenne and Fougères being taken en route. Of the reputation won by it at this time and the terror it inspired, the report sent to Paris by General Lenoir, commanding at Mayenne, gives a singular account. His troops, he wrote on November 1, had the day before consisted of 17,000 requisitioned men. "Six horsemen of the rebels having shown themselves at Martigné, which was guarded by 12,000 men, they all took flight.

Terror spread amongst the rest of the troops; last night the roads were covered with fugitives. . . . I called them together at four o'clock this morning, and not more than 500 men answered. I know not what has become of the rest. . . . I fear I may find myself alone before the day ends. . . ." [1]

It is likely enough that the forced recruits—it was the fashion to call them volunteers—had no mind to risk their lives in fighting men with whom they must often have been in secret sympathy. When troops of the line, the Parisian battalions, or the Mayençais soldiers were in question, it was another matter.

That same day Mayenne was evacuated; Ernée and Fougères were next seized. At the last-named town three battalions of the Blues were defeated, the Vendean victory being marked by one of the scenes growing too common. Three hundred royalist prisoners had been awaiting death when liberated by the arrival of their comrades; and the tale of what they had suffered, the thought of the death they had narrowly escaped, so excited the newcomers that no quarter was given. All who bore arms and were discovered in hiding were indiscriminately slain. On the other hand, according to the testimony of a republican,[2] the greater part of the soldiers found by the royalist generals at the château were treated as prisoners of war—their hair was cut and they were permitted to go free—only those who were recognised as released prisoners being shot. If the Vendean peasants cannot be acquitted of cruelty it must be remembered that their provocation was great. On quitting Fougères, it was necessary to leave

[1] Savary. [2] *La Vendée patriote*, Chassin.

a number of sick and wounded in the hospital, and a deputation was sent to the representatives of the people to beg that when the town was reoccupied by the republicans their lives should be safeguarded. The deputation was arrested and those on whose behalf they pleaded were massacred. "Our army of Fougères"—so ran the report—"has given the laggards and sick of the brigand army passports to go to the devil."

On the road to Fougères the end had come to Lescure's protracted agony. The excitement, perhaps the joy, of the success at Laval had proved too great for his strength, and since then the flicker of life had been dying gradually down.

"Is it a fine day?" he asked his wife as she drew back the curtains on the morning that Laval was to be left, adding, as she made answer in the affirmative, "Then there is something like a veil before my eyes. I see nothing distinctly."

Quietly and calmly he spoke to her. He had always believed, he said, that his wound was mortal; to-day he was convinced of it. His sole regret—save that he had not been able to place his King upon the throne—was that he was leaving her, with one baby, and again with child. "Your sorrow alone," he added, as she was choked with tears, "makes me regret life. For myself, I die at ease. Although a sinner, I have done nothing to cause me remorse or to trouble my conscience. I have served God with piety; I have fought for Him, and I die for Him. I hope in His mercy. I have often seen death near, and I do not fear it."

To the physicians he spoke in the same sense.

"I do not fear death," he told them. "Speak

the truth to me—I have some preparations to make. I think you are mistaken," he said when hopes were held out that life might still be saved. "Do not fail to give me notice when the moment is near."

The army was put in motion, the dying man being of necessity carried with it. As they journeyed on, tidings of the Queen's death, carefully concealed from him by his wife, were inadvertently communicated by an unwise friend, who read him an account from a newspaper of the details of the last melancholy scene. The news excited him to a dangerous degree.

"Ah, they have killed her—the monsters," he cried. "I fought to deliver her. If I live it will be to avenge her. No more quarter. . . ."

His fevered brain was haunted by the thought of what he had been told; he spoke incessantly of it. At Ernée it was perceived that his strength had suddenly failed—he was dying. A confessor was brought and the last sacraments administered; but power of speech was gone.

Even now it was impossible to accede to his wife's entreaty that she and her husband might be left behind, so that he might die in peace. Should the Blues follow on the track of the army, who could tell what would be the fate of the dying leader or his wife? and again the painful journey was resumed. It was to be the last. As Lescure lay in a carriage accompanied by the surgeon and a woman skilled in nursing, the end came, unknown to the wife who was riding close beside him. "I saw nothing," she wrote afterwards, "I had lost all power and thought; I distinguished neither outward objects nor what I was feeling. A dark cloud, a frightful void, surrounded me."

LOUIS MARIE, MARQUIS DE LESCURE.

From a lithograph in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

When Fougères was reached, the town being in possession of the troops which had preceded the melancholy procession, she entered it on foot, with the promise that she should be taken to her husband so soon as his carriage arrived. Conducted by his faithful aide de camp, the chevalier de Beauvolliers, to a lodging, the unhappy wife, filled with a presentiment of evil, sat waiting for its confirmation till the carriage arrived; then, "I made every one go out, and claimed the fulfilment of the chevalier de Beauvolliers' promise. He and I alone were ignorant that all was over. He quitted me. A moment later he returned, bathed in tears, took my hands, and told me I must think of saving my child."

At Avranches, some days later, all that remained of the man his soldiers loved to call the saint of Poitou was buried.

To La Rochejacquelein the loss was of the friend he loved and honoured beyond all others, and of the man to whom he looked up as disciple to master.

"You have lost your best friend," Madame de Lescure told Henri, when on the mournful morning after the arrival at Fougères he had come with some few others of her husband's special comrades, to offer her silent sympathy. "After myself you were dearest to him in this world."

"If my life could give him back to you," was Henri's answer, "I would bid you take it."

Meantime he had to do what was possible to fill the place of the men whose days of fighting were over. At Fougères one of the fatal and unaccountable delays calculated to spell failure for the royalists again took place. Had no time been lost in marching upon Rennes it would have been

impossible to exaggerate the danger to the republican forces; and the terror prevailing at the town itself is proof that the peril was there well understood. It was known that the peasantry around—fierce Breton peasants, accustomed to hardship, to gain a livelihood as smugglers, carrying their lives in their hands, and ever at war with constituted authorities—were hostile to the Republic; the fame of the Grande Armée had spread, and Rennes was panic-stricken. But four days were spent at Fougères in vain and purposeless discussion, sometimes in wrangles, and a golden opportunity was once more wasted. Unimportant details alone were settled, and even these served to afford matter for dispute. It was advisable in a strange country and amongst new recruits to whom the Vendean officers were personally unknown, to give the generals some distinctive badge; and they adopted a white sash, with a knot of colour. La Rochejacquelein had chosen black—was it in sign of mourning for his friend?—Stofflet red, Talmont blue; whilst subordinate officers wore a white scarf on their left arm. The step, innocent enough and indeed essential, created a feeling of resentment in a body where distinctions of rank had hitherto been almost non-existent, where the honour paid to the chiefs was mostly voluntary—the outcome of personal liking and respect—and the jealousies already rife were further embittered.

La Rochejacquelein, unequal to curbing the temper of the men under his command, and himself wholly free from ambition, was doubtless glad to throw himself into the practical work of raising the country. Nor was he unsuccessful in the attempt. Breton malcontents were crowding to the camp,

bringing guns, provisions, what they could, and most important of all, themselves. The churches were thronged, and fervid addresses delivered by the priests attached to the army, who left no effort untried to rouse the new recruits to greater and greater enthusiasm and kindle their zeal for God and the King. A doctor named Putaud—it was at his house at Fougères that Madame de Lescure had lodged—was in command of the Breton contingent named, as a special compliment to its devotion, "La petite Vendée." Yet it had become evident that Brittany was not prepared to rise *en masse*.

CHAPTER XX

November

At Fougères—Obenheim—Emigrants—Envoys—Letter of the comte d'Artois—A Vendean peasant in London—March towards the coast—Failure of the siege of Granville—Talmont under suspicion—A constitutional Bishop.

During the delay of the army at Fougères the work of disintegration went on rapidly. The misery of the situation, the sickness, hardship, and privation involved, the uncertainty of the future—these, if they were to be confronted with courage and borne with patience, demanded an entire devotion to the cause in which they were encountered, a full confidence in the leaders, and a sense of true comradeship amongst the fellow sufferers.

And these essentials were increasingly absent. As the peasants' eyes turned longingly homewards, a suspicion had gained ground that, in making the coast their goal, some at least of the chiefs had an eye to the possibility of finding their own salvation beyond the sea; further, not only were the military leaders at variance, but the Abbé Bernier, always a power with the peasants, had become an element rather of discord than of peace. Whether he had from the first disguised an inordinate ambition under the cloak of religious fervour, or whether the position he had been accorded in the army had exercised a disastrous influence upon his character, he appeared bent upon

creating a party of his own in secret rivalry to the legitimate authority of the military chiefs.

A somewhat ambiguous figure also now first appeared upon the scene. This was a person named Obenheim, belonging to the republican "corps de génie," who had been sent from Cherbourg to arrange for the defence of Fougères. Having fallen into the hands of the royalists, he had been recognised by Marigny as an old acquaintance; his life had been spared, and he had strangely obtained the full confidence of the Vendean leaders. A document printed by M. Chassin[1] makes his attitude clear. In an explanatory *Mémoire* attached to Obenheim's diary he describes his capture, and the necessity under which he found himself of choosing between death—a death useless to the Republic—and a prolongation of life on the only terms possible. He proceeds to boast of the services he had rendered his party by misleading the men who had spared and trusted him: "Once fallen into their power, it was necessary to serve them, deceive them, or die. The choice was not difficult," though he confesses to some remorse at the dissimulation involved. As a republican agent he played his part adroitly; the march upon Granville determined upon was undertaken partly by his advice, whilst his journal affords evidence that he regarded it as a fatal step.

By the Vendean chiefs he was believed to be in sympathy with the proscribed Girondists; over Talmont in particular he obtained considerable influence; was admitted to the military council, and even when, after the battle of Mans, the question of his good faith was raised, some of the leaders refused to enter-

[1] *La Vendée patriote*, Chassin.

tain the idea of treachery, remembering the gallantry he had displayed in fighting on their side.[1]

Double-dealing as he was, the journal containing his views on the Grande Armée at this stage of its existence is interesting as the result of the close observation of a man with full opportunities of forming a judgment and unblinded by the prejudices of a partisan.

He divided the troops into three classes. Four or five thousand brave men were always ready to march, provided they were led by La Rochejacquelein or Stofflet, nor could there be better marksmen. The second division—made up of some few thousands—was prepared to fight or fly according as the vanguard was victorious or the reverse. The rest of the army only showed itself when the battle was over. Arguing on this theory, Obenheim placed the real strength of the Vendeans at no more than about 5,000 men, constantly diminishing in number. For the Council he had an unmitigated contempt, considering it destitute of any true authority.

Now that it had become practically certain that Talmont's anticipations of a general rising in Brittany were to be disappointed, the only rational hope for the future lay in the possibility that England might, after all, come to the rescue. Again and again such hopes were raised. It is difficult to judge how far

[1] *Mémoires*, Madame de La Rochejacquelein. The readiness shown by the royalists to credit the good faith of deserters is curious. At Craon three soldiers belonging to d'Autichamp's former regiment were taken prisoners, and were spared and presented with arms on condition that they served with the Vendeans. On the very next day they deserted. Beauvais was shortly afterwards deceived in the same way by a Swiss.

the accounts given of the several missions purporting to proceed from the English Government are to be trusted. The papers were commonly brought by emigrants who, although presenting documents which, if vaguely worded, held out every prospect of substantial assistance, appear usually to have added private warnings to the effect that British promises should not be implicitly relied upon. Whilst the army was at Fougères two envoys had appeared, having crossed the Channel with dispatches concealed in a hollow stick. One of these purported to be a letter from George III, couched in complimentary terms; the second bore the signatures of Pitt and Dundas. Both were once more lavish of promises, yet urged that before an English descent was made, Saint-Malo or, should that prove impossible, Granville should be acquired. Lest, however, overmuch confidence should be placed in pledges the Vendean chiefs were only too anxious to believe to be genuine, a third letter was produced from the same hiding-place—in which the marquis de Dresnay, a Breton noble, cautioned La Rochejacquelein against possible duplicity on the part of the British Government. An expedition was, he admitted, ready to start; on the other hand more than 7,000 emigrants were awaiting in vain, at Jersey and Guernsey, permission to repair to La Vendée.

The prevalent feeling amongst the royalist leaders was therefore one of mistrust of British good faith. But they were not in a position to refuse what might be a last chance, and the required promise that the attack upon Granville should be made was sent back to England. Explaining their desperate condition and their great destitution, they begged for help in the matter of military stores and money, and entreated

—an entreaty that, to the shame of the Bourbons, was never granted—that a Prince of the Blood or a Marshal of France should be sent to take over the command.[1]

A letter addressed a month or more earlier by the comte d'Artois to the duc d'Harcourt, ambassador in London, is fully explanatory of his attitude. According to it he had neglected nothing which would have enabled him to reach Poitou and join the royal and Catholic army. The letter brought by Tinténiac had made a profound impression upon him; he had been touched to the bottom of his soul by the confidence of these good Frenchmen. It was the voice of honour that called him, and he would be unworthy of public esteem if his most ardent desire were not to brave all in order to assume the post pointed out by duty and interest. He would, however, be guilty were he to yield solely to a just enthusiasm and thereby to compromise the true interests of those he ought to serve; and the ambassador was directed whilst expressing his wishes to the Court of St. James', to insist on them only so far as they were in agreement with the views of the Cabinet and would not retard the prompt support the generous English would doubtless send to those fighting for God and the King. "My true post is at the head of the Catholic and royal army, and wherever I may be I will go thither speedily the moment I am informed by you that England will approve of my taking this honourable step."[2]

[1] Republican writers, M. Chassin amongst them, consider their appeal to England for help a capital offence on the part of the royalists. It is difficult, their point of view granted, to see any reason why it should not have been made.

[2] Deniau; from the MS. found by Chamard in the British Museum.

It might have cooled the ardour of the royalist chiefs had they enjoyed the opportunity of perusing the letter of the man in whose cause they were fighting, and the peasants might have understood that the Bourbons were not men to die for. Perhaps they were learning that lesson. At the house of the agent of the princes in London, Chateaubriand noticed, some months later, amongst the crowd of adventurers, fortune-hunters, "*vendeurs de contre-révolution*," a man sitting apart, of whom none took heed and who, his eyes fixed on an engraving of the death of Wolfe, took heed of none.

"*Ce n'est rien*," was the answer made to his inquiries. The man was nothing but a Vendean peasant, the bearer of letters from his chiefs. "He had the indifferent air of the savage; his look was grey and inflexible as an iron rod; his lower lip trembled over his clenched teeth. . . . He spoke no more than a lion, yawned like a lion *ennuyé*, and dreamed, it seemed, of blood and of forests. . . . The giants were sending to ask the pigmies for leaders. The wild messenger I saw had seized the Revolution by the throat; he had cried, 'Come, pass behind me; it shall do you no harm; it shall not move; I hold it.'"[1]

But none would go, and the peasant relaxed his grip. The Republic was saved.

In accordance with the decision of the majority of the leaders, the army set out on the way to Granville, leaving Fougères on November 6. Stofflet, bitterly opposed to the line determined upon, did not yield without a last practical protest. In command of the vanguard, he had once before altered the route of the army by simply leading the way in an

[1] *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe.*

unauthorised direction. He now attempted by the same means to divert its course and to induce it to follow him to Rennes.

It would have been well had the act of insubordination had the result he hoped. When his forerunners appeared in the neighbourhood of the town, panic prevailed. The greater part of the garrison had been withdrawn; the general in command made no defence and evacuated the city, leaving it to be entered by the royalists, who, with no leader but Stofflet, misconducted themselves in a manner inviting reprisals. Had the Vendeans been at hand in force, they would have remained masters of Rennes, its arsenal, and its stores. The army had, however, continued its march as originally arranged, and Stofflet, left to himself, had no alternative save to rejoin the main body and accompany it towards Granville.

Antrain had been the first stage. Dol, where no defence was attempted, was the next. What passed there is variously related, the wholesale pillage of which the royalists were accused by republican writers being denied by others. It seems clear that it was strictly prohibited, and that three soldiers guilty of it suffered the death penalty. But certain Alsatians, to whom were added some republican deserters, had formed themselves into a body called the "Bande noire," ready for any deeds of murder or robbery and avowedly determined to raise the flag of vengeance, and this battalion no doubt brought discredit upon the rest of the Grande Armée. What La Rochejacquelein could do to put a stop to their proceedings was done. It was nevertheless impossible wholly to dissociate his soldiers from the crimes of their allies. For the rest, a famishing army could not

be prevented from obtaining food and other necessaries where and how they could; whether without any kind of payment, or whether paper money of very problematical value was given in exchange for the articles exacted.

In the republican camp at Rennes, Rossignol, now appointed to be commander-in-chief of all the armies of the west, openly scoffed at humanity shown to an enemy. "I make every effort to destroy all that is a danger to liberty," he wrote at this time to the Committee of Public Safety, "but there are still some humane men—*des hommes humains*—and in times of revolution this is in my opinion a fault."

The men whose indulgence he deplored were likely enough Kleber and also Haxo, who was doing his utmost to mitigate the horrors inflicted on the population south of the Loire. It was perhaps for this reason that these two generals were denounced by the Parisian authorities as royalists in disguise, upon whom a watchful eye must be kept by the representatives in the west. Kleber had, in fact, before long a narrow escape of death by the guillotine.

The Vendean march was made in misery and wretchedness. Winter had come, and a cold rain was falling, rendering the roads heavy with mud. Often barefooted, the men plodded painfully on, and enthusiasm, extinguished by physical exhaustion, was dying down. A significant symptom of coming disaster was contained in the growing distrust felt for the leaders, and by the determination the peasants were beginning to evince to turn their steps at all costs homewards. Endurance had been strained to the breaking-point, and their longing to see once more the familiar places where their lives had been passed was

ever gaining force. Let them fight and die, if need be, but at home. In vain La Rochejacquelein spoke of past successes, of rest to come should Granville be captured. Even the admonitions of the priests had lost their old power; and in the end, though the mass of the army consented to remain faithful to its chiefs, some hundreds of men, with their wives and children, started, a forlorn, unarmed party, and took a course southward, in the vain hope that, by meeting the enemy defenceless, they might be spared and permitted to pursue their way. As their comrades later on retraced their road the mutilated bodies of the hapless deserters testified to the fate that had befallen them.

On November 11 Pontorson was reached, situated on the frontier separating Brittany from Normandy; and on the following day the army was at Avranches. Avranches was defended by no more than 5,000 or 6,000 raw levies, who fled at once. Here the non-combatant portion of the Vendeans, with the least efficient of the troops, were left, under the care of the wounded Royrand, Fleuriot, and Rostaing. La Rochejacquelein at the head of 25,000 men set out for Granville.

Granville remained the last hope, a forlorn hope, of the army—Granville, with the possible co-operation of an English expedition, or at the least of some help from Jersey, where the emigrants were gathered in force. The alarm caused by the approach of the royalist troops to the seaport corroborates the opinion of some authorities that, had the siege been conducted after another fashion, it might have proved successful. Le Carpentier, the representative on mission in the town, wrote in almost despairing terms to Paris. In

the absence of reinforcements, it would be impossible in his opinion to hold out for long. The *Mémoires* of General Peyre, in charge of the defence, testify to the serious view he, too, took of the situation. Yet from the first the attack appears to have been doomed to failure. Every preparation had been made to resist it. The town was enthusiastically republican, and the whole population, old men, women, and children, assisted in working at the fortifications. On November 14 the siege began, a demand for surrender having been sent before on the chance that the city, full of peaceful inhabitants, might come to terms. As a unique document put forth by La Rochejacquelein during his command north of the Loire a certain interest attaches to this proclamation, made in the name of the Catholic and royal army—an army preferring, as it had proved, the conquest of hearts to that of towns and fortresses. Let the past be forgotten, let the shedding of French blood be spared; let the doors be opened, with no blow struck, to friends who came to give peace and happiness, swearing that life and property would be held sacred and inviolable. If resistance, on the other hand, was offered, those who had conquered the soldiers of Mayence and Valenciennes were at the gates, and would force them open by fire and sword.

The last was easier said than done. The besiegers possessed none of the appliances necessary to take a fortified town by storm—a town moreover well adapted for defence, situated upon a high promontory, and only reached by means of a narrow isthmus dominated by ramparts. The attack, nevertheless, opened with a certain amount of success, and the

suburb of St. Nicholas was occupied, the Vendeans penetrating as far as the walls of the town, so as to leave no way of escape to those within it. The royalist divisions took up their positions in good order and directed what poor cannon they possessed upon the town; but their guns were powerless to effect a breach in the walls, and when La Rochejacquelein, leading a body of chosen men in person, attempted to take the town by assault it proved impossible. The defence was gallant and well conducted; the suburbs whence the besiegers fired on the town were set on fire, and though the fight was stubbornly sustained by La Rochejacquelein for twenty-four hours, it must soon have been apparent that, in the absence of the hoped-for support from England, the issue was a foregone conclusion. The shout of a republican deserter, fighting in the royalist ranks, "Let us fly. We are betrayed," created a panic at an early stage in the combat. As it proceeded many of the leaders were disabled; whilst the flames, spreading from the suburbs to the town itself as night came on, threw a lurid light over the strong walls and impregnable fortifications. The peasants lost heart; La Rochejacquelein, refusing to despair, exposed himself so recklessly that Beauvais told him he was acting like a schoolboy, yet eventually was forced to recognise the expediency of beating a retreat.

Had the royalists known it, dismay was at that moment prevailing in the town. The flames were spreading; and to Le Carpentier the peril from fire appeared so imminent that he is said to have contemplated flight.[1] The cannonade was stopped, that

[1] Deniau.

the soldiers might assist in putting out the flames. The Vendeans, however, had fallen back, and the fight was suspended.

An attempt made in the morning to attack the town from the coast proved vain. The Vendean artillerymen, half-starving and exhausted, had found a store of brandy and had rendered themselves incapable of taking aim; two republican gunboats had also appeared and directed their fire upon the assailants; and, defeated at all points, it was becoming evident that the siege must be abandoned. On the battlefield the priests blessed the living, comforted the dying, the sham Bishop amongst them, calm amidst the bullets, "as if seeking that death his position made him desire."[1] When the combat was over, 1,200 corpses were found on the place where it had been carried on.

The attack had failed. What was to be the next step? A proposal was made by La Rochejacquelein—surely a last expedient—to form a camp in some spot sheltered from the republican fire, and there await the arrival of problematical succour from England.[2] But the peasants were firm in their refusal to take into their reckoning the support of a power which had so signally failed them in the hour of need.

[1] *Mémoires*, La Rochejacquelein.

[2] In a letter addressed on December 6, by Prigent, the royalist agent, to the Vendean generals, and which fell into republican hands, it appears that all was arranged for an English expedition, to be dispatched so soon as a port of disembarkation had been secured. "The fleet that I saw at Portsmouth," he wrote, "must now be at Jersey, waiting for you. . . . Hasten, Messieurs, I cannot urge you too much to hasten. You are awaited by the English and by our brothers the emigrants like the Messiah." But the help which might have turned the scale was never given.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, on November 15, when La Rochejacquelein consented to raise the siege. What the raising of it meant, he, better than any other, knew. The troops, bitterly disappointed, without food, without munitions of war, demoralised, disorganised, were demanding in louder and louder tones to be led homewards, and again there mingled with that demand the threat of desertion. England was freely reviled—England which, holding out hopes it had not fulfilled, had lured the army to its destruction. It was vain to offer explanations, as unconvincing to those who gave them as to those who listened. The troops had once more taken matters into their own hands. They would retrace their steps, would seize Angers, cross the Loire, and return home. Opposition would have been useless. Before they could be prevented, the peasants had themselves started for Avranches, flying, leaderless, along the way they had traversed so short a time before. La Rochejacquelein would in any case have been forced to accompany them; and it is said that in his heart, he, too, was in favour of the attempt to cross the Loire. Yet, as he strove to cheer and encourage the unhappy multitude, and to dissipate the suspicions entertained of many of the chiefs, even his voice failed to move them. One thing and one only they demanded—to be led home. When Stofflet marched with a chosen band to attack Villedieu, a small town near, not more than 800 men would follow him, fearing that the expedition was merely an excuse to facilitate the escape to England of their leaders.

Whilst the army was still within easy reach of the

seacoast an incident took place, variously related, but in any case significant of the excited and suspicious temper of the troops.

It was discovered one morning that Talmont, Bernier, the eldest Beauvolliers[1] and one or two others, were missing, and the report gained ground that they had embarked in a fishing-boat for Jersey. That the peasants, in their condition of nervous irritation, should have believed the story, is not inexplicable; that Stofflet should have accepted it at once as true, have seized the Prince's horses, and sent men in pursuit of the party with orders to arrest them as deserters, is more singular. They shortly returned, though not under arrest, to the camp, where the sight of the Prince sufficed in some degree to allay suspicion.

The explanation he offered was simple. Certain women, wives and daughters of emigrants, anxious to escape by sea, had applied to Talmont for assistance, and he had bargained with a boatman to convey them to Jersey, escorting them to the shore, accompanied by Beauvolliers and others. The fishing-boat had been unable, by reason of the tide, to come near enough to take off the intending passengers; a republican detachment had been sighted in the distance, and the enterprise was relinquished.[2] The explanation was received with acclamation; Bernier preached obedience and discipline to the excited peasants; whilst the reproaches of La Rochejacquelein, who had never mistrusted his brothers-in-arms, were

[1] Three of these brothers were in the army.

[2] Such is the story told by Madame de La Rochejacquelein. M. Joly-Crétineau gives it a more romantic colour which does not strike the reader as probable.

still more efficacious in rousing the culprits to repentance.

What was the truth must remain uncertain. Madame de La Rochejacquelein, herself disposed to accept the Prince's story as true, admits that many persons refused to acquit him and his companions of the intention to desert. Some officers, Major Soyer and Beauvais amongst them, remained convinced that Talmont's intention of abandoning the army had only been frustrated by circumstances. Yet the Prince, with many faults, was a man of honour and gallantry, and met his death, only a few months later, with courage. In the absence of proof it is fair to give him the benefit of the doubt.

A second episode, taking place about this time, displays a constitutional Bishop in a favourable light. As the royalist army passed near Mont-Saint-Michel on its way to Granville, a detachment of troops had been sent to liberate a number of unsworn priests, kept there in captivity. One of the prisoners was Lecoz, Bishop of Ille et Vilaine, who, as abbé, had adopted with enthusiasm the principles of the Revolution, had taken the civic oath, was the author of revolutionary pamphlets, and had been raised by the government to the episcopate. That he was, in spite of all this, sharing the captivity of the unsworn priests who had so little else in common with him was due to his firm refusal to break his vow of celibacy and to marry.

When, on the arrival of the Vendeans, he watched his fellow prisoners eagerly accepting their deliverance, he had warned them that they were playing a dangerous part; that the royalist success could be only temporary, and that to leave their prison

would be to incur later on the penalty of death. It was not likely that he would be believed, and as he himself remained in his cell, menaces were freely directed at him by the men he had sought to save—a letter of his own going so far as to state that they would have liked him to be taken to head quarters and burned alive. Whether or not credit is to be attached to this last assertion, he was soon to be given an opportunity of returning good for evil. On the defeat of the royalists, some score of the priests who had treated his advice with contempt thought it well to come back to their place of confinement and thus to propitiate an enemy from whose hands they could scarcely hope to escape. The revolutionary government, however, was not thus to be baulked of its victims, and orders reached the municipal authorities of Mont-Saint-Michel that any contumacious priests who had left their prison were to be sent to Granville for punishment. Fortunately for them, the *intrus* Bishop was consulted by the officials as to the manner in which their instructions should be construed. His answer displayed—the situation taken into account—no little magnanimity.

"There is only one way out of the difficulty," he replied. "It would be too shameful to deliver up men who of their own accord came to place themselves in your power. Make out certificates to the effect that they never left Mont-Saint-Michel; and I, whose constitutional views are known, will sign them."

The pious fraud was successful, and the priests were saved.

CHAPTER XXI

November

Republican inefficiency—Last royalist successes—Victory at Dol—And at Antrain—Republican systematic slaughter—March towards the Loire.

If the doom of the royalist army was sealed by the siege of Granville, it was not to be destroyed without a struggle or without cost to the enemy.

Yet for the present its condition can have given little hope. As the end drew near, ferocity appeared to increase. General Sepher, formerly beadle of the church of Saint-Eustache in Paris, had been dispatched to Granville, and though he arrived after the siege had been raised he found work for his soldiers in capturing some 800 wounded or disabled Vendeans who had sought shelter in the woods around. To these unhappy fugitives it was decided by him, with Laplanche, member of the Convention and ex-monk, and General Tribout, that one remedy only should be applied—they must be shot down. When the massacre was over, a single woman remained alive, whose courage so moved the Blues that she was spared. Nor were the royalists blameless, and when Stofflet and his little band seized Villedieu, the town was pillaged and blood freely shed.

As on former occasions, so at the present juncture, the one poor hope of escape from destruction lay, for the royalists, in republican inefficiency and divided counsels. Jealousy and mutual distrust

prevailed. The Mayençais, no longer permitted to continue a separate body, and incorporated with the rest of the troops, were in especial regarded with dislike and suspicion. "The *ci-devant* garrison of Mayence," wrote the Adjutant-General Rouyer to the Minister of War, "seems to me to believe still that it is an army within the army. The generals and officers are not yet well penetrated by that precious spirit of unity which constitutes a true republic. . . . Canclaux and Aubert Dubayet are still regretted. Of all the actual generals none but Kleber is esteemed. You can imagine that pains are taken to inculcate in the soldiers this scorn and mistrust. . . ."

Kleber, on the other hand, had a profound contempt for the ineptitude, the constant change of plans, and the absence of combination, shown by generals and representatives alike. "Never," he observes in his diary, in allusion to a council of war held at Rennes—"never had I seen a collection of men less fitted to lead troops."

It is true that treason, undoubtedly present in the republican ranks, excuses to some extent the distrust shown for generals of noble birth. At Granville there is reason to believe that the sudden substitution of fresh officers for the nobles commanding the regiment of Aunis was necessary to prevent co-operation with the besiegers. Danican cannot be acquitted, at the coming attack on Angers, as before at Laval, of playing into the hands of the royalists; and Tilly, commanding the troops of the Côtes de Cherbourg, boasted at a later date of the services he had rendered or striven to render at this time to the royalist cause.

Yet notwithstanding any circumstances that may

have been working in favour of the Grande Armée, it seems strange, when its miserable plight is considered —hampered besides by its helpless train of non-combatants—that any anxiety should have been felt by its opponents. The event was, however, to prove that anxiety was justified. Inspirited by the consciousness that their faces were at length turned homewards and that every victory removed an obstacle from their path to La Vendée, the troops were destined to enjoy some last gleams of success. At Pontorson a body of republicans under the command of General Tribout—"whose reputation as a *sans-culotte*," writes Kleber, "served him in the place of military talent"—was defeated and put to flight. The royalists were elated, the republicans alarmed. "The generals are all frightened at their position," wrote Bon-Saint-André to the Committee of Public Safety. "Their fears are well founded."

Dol was next occupied by the royalists; and here it was that one of the strangest scenes of the war occurred.

In spite of the jealousy felt of Kleber by his inferiors in military skill, he was essential as an adviser, and the plan he had elaborated—that of establishing a species of blockade and terminating the war by a system of "active defence" rather than by open combat—had been adopted. The Vendeans, shut up in Dol, were to be constantly harassed, prevented from obtaining provisions, and practically starved out. Had the scheme been carried into effect, Kleber's expectations might have been fulfilled, but once again a "*belle étourderie*"[1] of Westermann's interfered with its execution. In consequence of a letter from

[1] Kleber.

him, all was changed by the council of war, and an immediate attack on the Grande Armée arranged.

The condition of the famished multitude crowded into the little town of Dol shows the wisdom of Kleber's scheme. Soldiers wounded and whole, women, children, all lacked the absolute necessaries of life. Madame de Lescure went to bed hungry. Potatoes, found in a garden, and eaten raw, were a treasure trove. Had the blockade been maintained, the army could not long have held out. But Westermann was impatient to annihilate it by some brilliant feat of arms, and at midnight on November 20 the attack was made.

At first the Vendeans were taken by surprise, and a small body of Blues had actually penetrated into the town before the alarm was given. They were driven back, and when the main body of the republican troops arrived upon the scene of action, La Rochejacquelein was ready to receive them. All was prepared, either in case of success or failure. The women, the wounded, and the helpless, were ranged outside the houses of the wide street which was all the town possessed. In the centre were the baggage-wagons, with the reserve of artillery, the small body of cavalry being placed on each side of the guns, waiting either to move forward to join in the fight, or, in case of defeat, to serve as a protection to the defenceless and the cannon alike.

There, in the darkness, the women awaited in silence the issue of the combat on which their lives depended. Half an hour went by, no sound being audible save the roll of the drums, the roar of the cannon, and the sharper rattle of musketry. Then, suddenly, came a shout. It was the order to the

cavalry to advance—"*Vive le Roi!*" Women, men, all, joined in the cry—it meant that the attack of the Blues had been repulsed. For the moment that expectant crowd was saved.

Westermann had been beaten back, and when Marceau arrived with reinforcements he had been met by Stofflet. The royalists had held their own. Yet after three hours' fighting, the result was uncertain, and when morning came neither side had triumphed. It was at this stage in the battle that a singular misunderstanding came near to giving the Vendeans a prey into the hands of their enemies. A fog had crept up, so dense that it was impossible to see more than ten yards ahead; and fear lest it should be used as a cover for some ambuscade took possession of many of the soldiers. Each trifling incident, magnified by the obscurity, supplied matter for alarm—a rapid rider, dispatched to bring more powder, the crowding of men round a cart carrying bread, were enough to give birth to nervous fears; and when La Rochejacquelein was seen to leave the battlefield—he was merely going to join Stofflet—his men leapt to the conclusion that they were defeated. The entire army, save a picked body who, under Talmont, kept up the fight in front, was seized by one of the sudden panics to which it was subject, and, flying back towards the town, spread the news of a disaster.

In a moment the street was filled with a flying throng, made up of soldiers, women, and children, all anticipating a massacre so soon as they should be overtaken by the Blues. In vain a few hundred horsemen did what was possible to arrest the stream of fugitives.

"*Allons, les braves, à la mort!*" was the cry of some of these, mingled with cheers for the King and for La Rochejacquelein; but the invitation to court a soldier's death found few to respond to it. Beauvais —one of those who tell the story—was entreating the fugitives with tears to stand firm, was pointing out to them that there was no way of escape, and that victory alone could save them. His words fell on deaf ears. Even Stofflet, whose courage no man could question, caught the infection of despair; he believed the day lost, and no alternative left but flight. Not, however, for long, and he was soon amongst the number of those who were attempting to stem the torrent. It was imagined in the town that La Rochejacquelein was slain; women, children, mad with grief and terror, and sobbing as they fled, mingled with the soldiers; some of the wounded were crushed and trampled by the crowd; mothers were hiding their children. Marigny, always fierce, always brave, adjured the men to die fighting, and endeavoured, sword in hand, to force them back to their places in the ranks. Failing to make any impression on them, he turned to the women.

"*Eh bien, Poitevines,*" he said, "will you be as cowardly as the men?"

"No, M. de Marigny," they cried, picking up the guns with which the ground was strewn. "Go before us; we will follow you."

Madame de Bonchamps entreated the soldiers who had served under her dead husband to stand firm. Other women, not content with admonitions to the fugitives, barred their way, striking them as they fled. Nor were the priests backward in the attempt to induce the panic-stricken peasants to

rally. Standing on a hillock above them the curé of Sainte-Marie of Rhé demanded of the men his voice could reach if they would shame themselves by permitting the slaughter of their wives and children. Safety lay in fighting alone.

"*Mes enfants*," he cried, "I will march at your head, the Crucifix in my hand. Let those who will follow me kneel. I will give them absolution, and if they fall they will go to Paradise." For the cowards who forsook God and their wives and children another fate was reserved—death at the hands of the Blues, and after death damnation.

"More than 2,000 men," adds Madame de La Rochejacquelein, who describes the scene, "fell on their knees, and he gave them absolution in a loud voice; the men departing with the cry '*Vive le Roi!* we go to Paradise."

"It is the only time," says the writer, "that I have seen the priests *fanaticise* the soldiers, as the republicans called it."

Meanwhile, without the town, the battle was still raging. As La Rochejacquelein watched the flight, it was no wonder that he conceived that his last battle had been fought. Despair got the better of him, and he resolved that he would not survive the shame and the disgrace, following hard upon the victory he had come so near to winning, and he placed himself with crossed arms in front of a battery.

"Death will have none of me," he cried, as the balls, falling around, left him unhurt. An instant later his brave spirit had recognised that there was still work for him to do. The sound of firing at a distance showed that, somewhere, the fight was

carried on, and whilst this was the case it was no time for the commander-in-chief to leave his post. Guided by the guns, he reached the spot where Talmont, aided by the fog which disguised the thinness of his numbers, was keeping the Blues under Marceau at bay. Jean Chouan had joined him; the fugitives were rallied and took courage; and soon the fight was raging fiercely again.

An unexpected piece of good fortune definitely turned the tide in favour of the royalists. General Muller, who had arrived to support Marceau, and, as his superior in rank, took over the command, proved, with most of his staff officers, to be drunk. It was vain for Kleber and Rossignol, informed by Marceau of the state of affairs, to hurry to the spot; confusion had been introduced into the republican ranks, and presently the attempt to retrieve the situation was relinquished, and the Blues were in full retreat.

Talmont, who had succeeded in keeping up the fight whilst the main body of the army was in flight, was the hero of the day; and to him La Rochejacquelein was eager to award the credit of having transformed imminent disaster into victory.

Crowding to the church, the soldiers gave thanks to God, kneeling as the curé of Sainte-Marie passed along at the head of the men he had led back to the field of battle, chanting the *Vexilla Regis* as he went.

The royalists had counted upon a rest after their victory; but day after day fighting went on and still they were victorious. Kleber noted with grief and shame the cowardice of some at least amongst the

republican troops, and reiterated his contemptuous comments upon the constant change of purpose and inefficiency of the military and civil authorities. Westermann and Bouin de Marigny were defeated; it was found impossible for even the more trustworthy regiments, summoned in haste, to stand against desperate men struggling for their very existence. Kleber, Marceau, Rossignol, were driven back. The rout of the Blues was complete.

Another triumph followed. Exhausted by their exertions, the republicans, who had reached Antrain, were resting, convinced that the royalists would be too much worn out to pursue them, when the Vendeans fell upon them. In the hand-to-hand fight that ensued all was confusion. Roused from sleep and taken unawares, the Blues had scarcely time to range themselves in battle array. Rossignol, no coward though an inefficient leader, so far lost his head as to choose this moment to tender his resignation to the representatives. He had sworn, he told them, to defend the Republic till death; but he was not the man to command an army.

His resignation was not accepted.

"You are the eldest son of the Committee of Public Safety," said Prieur—himself a member of it. "You shall have generals to advise you, who shall answer on your behalf for the events of the war."

The time for the discussion was strangely chosen. It was interrupted by Marceau, bringing tidings of the royalist success. The Blues were in flight, Antrain was being taken. It was no longer possible to make a stand, and troops and generals fled. No quarter was given, and there perished in especial

many of the prisoners already released, whose short hair showed that they had broken their pledge by serving once more against the men who had spared them.

The Blues fled towards Rennes. Talmont, with his horsemen, few and poorly mounted, pursued them. Their baggage was seized and with it a number of wagon-loads of wounded, who were brought back to Antrain. The fate of these last hung in the balance. The Vendeans had lately had much to avenge. The slaughter of the wounded royalists left behind at Fougères, on the reoccupation of the town by the republicans,[1] had been accompanied by circumstances of special brutality.

"You must be informed," wrote Robespierre's friend, the doctor Gainou, to his chief, "that undisciplined soldiers went to the hospitals at Fougères and cut the throats of the wounded brigands in their beds," adding that the sick women had endured even a worse fate.

As the wagon-loads of wounded prisoners were brought into the royalist camp at Antrain the soldiers remembered their wounded comrades at Fougères; they remembered fifty prisoners shot only a few days back at Pontorson; they remembered other outrages for which they now had an opportunity of taking vengeance. Nevertheless better counsels prevailed; and not only were the lives of the captives spared, but help and clothing were bestowed upon them, and they were dispatched to Rennes with a letter signed by La Rochejacquelein and his comrades. "The royalist army," it ran, "avenges the cruelties of its foes by acts of humanity." Once

[1] See page 253

again—not this time on the field of battle—the Vendeans had conquered.[1]

The sequel was a singular one. The wounded republicans on their arrival at Rennes presented the letter they brought to the municipal authorities of the town. No verbal answer was made; but not more than an hour later Dehargues, a royalist officer captured during the fight of the previous day, died upon the scaffold at Rennes.[2]

Nor was this all. On that same day a letter written from Avranches by Laplanche, member of the Convention, to the Committee of Public Safety, tells its own story:

"We found, on our arrival here yesterday, many rebels who had stayed behind, and to whom our arrival in this place had not left time for flight. They all filled the hospital. The national vengeance has been executed, and there is no further question of them. Of their number was a woman who had taken shelter in an inn on the pretext of sickness."

More significant still was the report sent to the Convention by the Military Committee then sitting at Laval, which places beyond doubt the deliberate system of slaughter pursued by the authorities at this time. Rendering an account of the labours of the Committee in various towns, it sums up the result: "You will see that we condemned to deten-

[1] Obenheim states that amongst the prisoners had been found several soldiers released at Fougères on condition that they should not again bear arms against the royalist army, and that the men now taken were thereupon shot, save those who were captured for the first time, "excepté ceux de la première requisition." The two accounts are not, however irreconcilable.

[2] Dehargues had been captured almost in the act of directing his men to take no prisoners, so that his fate was not unjust.

tion six private persons, nineteen to irons, forty-two wretches—nobles, priests, and other conspirators—to death. Included in these last were four women, three of them girls, one a nursing Sister of Doué and the other two *ci-devant* nobles." An account follows of the capture of certain Chouans—"a new kind of robbers and murderers"—of the slaughter of some of their number in the presence of an immense multitude, and of other executions. "Finally two girls, *ci-devant* nobles, who had followed the Vendean brigands, were yesterday arrested and brought to us, and have suffered the penalty of death."

So far the successes of the royalist army had transcended all the expectations of the most sanguine of its leaders. To Kleber it appeared that the Republic fought to lose: "Deeply affected by all I had witnessed . . . I was almost convinced that the disasters of this terrible war were purposely prolonged." Obenheim, looking on, cool and dispassionate, took a different view. In his eyes the Vendean army was a wounded boar, seeking with desperation to overcome the obstacles in its path. Obenheim was doubtless right. In spite of its success, in spite of the hopes its success had raised, the agony of the Grande Armée, it has been said, had begun. Its continued existence was only a question of weeks or days. Each victory cost men and munitions it had no power to replace; whilst, whatever losses the republicans might suffer, their resources were in no danger of being exhausted.

Yet possibilities remained, capable of prolonging at least the struggle. The demoralisation of the Blues was, for the moment, complete. In Rennes, and still more in the country surrounding it, royal-

ists were numerous. Brittany was in a condition of partial revolt and overrun by isolated bands of Chouans, ready to act as auxiliaries to the Vendeans. A march upon Rennes offered the best chance of escape from the ruin by which they were threatened when the republicans should have had time to rally and collect reinforcements. This was the course advocated by La Rochejacquelein and anticipated by the enemy, the danger they apprehended from it shown by the fact that they had already determined to reduce the city to ashes should they be compelled to abandon it.

The majority of the royalist chiefs were nevertheless in favour of a return to Granville, now undefended, and of awaiting there English succour. It was found equally impossible to carry out either of these schemes. The army continued stubborn in its determination to find its way home at all hazards. The leaders might argue, persuade, entreat—all was vain. To every argument the peasants were deaf. There was no choice but to let them have their will, to retrace their steps and effect a crossing of the Loire wherever it should prove feasible. The march was therefore continued in the direction of the river.

CHAPTER XXII

November—December

March towards the Loire—Republican dissensions—Siege of Angers—Royalist defeat—Marceau in command—At La Flêche—Defeat at Mans—Flight to Laval.

In accordance with the determination evinced by the peasants, the Grande Armée—or what remained of what once had been the Grande Armée—was making its painful way towards the river lying between it and the land of its desire; ignorant that it was in truth the river of death it was approaching and that the country to which it journeyed was not the familiar home it longed to see, but the unknown realm lying beyond the grave.

As the long procession of men, women, and children moved wearily back along the road they had traversed so short a time before, the bodies of stragglers who had fallen out of the march and had perished from hunger, sickness, exhaustion, or at the hands of the enemy, strewn along the track, warned them of the fate ready to overtake them. Yet hope still urged them on. Suffering from every kind of privation and with disease rapidly gaining ground, they struggled forward, sustained by the consciousness that every step brought them nearer home.

Fougères, Ernée, Mayenne, were reached in turn,

and occupied without opposition. At Laval, the next stage in the journey, food in abundance was found; but a bitter disappointment awaited those who had hoped to liberate the prisoners confined there. Before the evacuation of the town on the approach of the Vendeans, the military tribunal had done its work and none remained alive. It was difficult to prevent reprisals, nor were the leaders wholly successful in doing so.

At Rennes, meanwhile, discord and dissension, together with consternation, reigned. Kleber and young Marceau, with others of their comrades, were opposed to the group of representatives—Prieur, Turreau, and Bourbotte—who, with Rossignol, were the trusted agents of the central government, and eager to charge the guilt of the recent disasters upon whomsoever was obnoxious to them. The first victim deprived of his command was General Nouvion, "combining," says Kleber, "with much talent a large amount of modesty, and possessing the friendship and esteem of all officers capable of appreciating him." Every man who disliked the methods in favour in high quarters must have been conscious that a like fate, or a worse one, hung over his head. If Rossignol was a cipher, each officer taking what steps appeared best to him, he was a cipher liable to become dangerous. As for Kleber, the recognition of his military gifts had so far maintained him in his position, notwithstanding the suspicion with which he was regarded. It was shared in great measure by Marceau, now in command of the infantry, who was known to have set his face against cruelty and brutality. "Whenever I wake thinking of the terrors of La Vendée," he told a friend afterwards,

"I am torn by those horrible memories—there is no more sleep for me." Not more than twenty-four, he had been a soldier for years, and the high opinion entertained of him by Kleber is shown by the fact that it was by his advice that he had been given his present post. "As his friend," explains the older man, "I was certain he would undertake nothing save in concert with me. Marceau was young, active, full of courage and boldness. Cooler than he, I was at hand to restrain his eagerness, should it carry him away. We promised one another not to separate till we had rendered our colours again victorious."

Whilst Kleber's advice, in this instance and others, had been taken, there was no security that any plan of action, though deliberately adopted, would not be abandoned in a few hours, miscarriage in its execution being not unlikely to result in the death or disgrace of the man responsible for it. The temper of Prieur, at least, a member of the council of war, is shown by a passage in Kleber's diary:

"After the council it was the custom to remain together for a time to discuss the condition of affairs. Prieur then abandoned himself to his revolutionary delirium; for, as he often said, 'I am the *romancier* of the Revolution.' The burden of a commandership-in-chief was spoken of, with the responsibility inseparable from it—an allusion to Rossignol being intended. Prieur, perceiving this, said at once, 'The Committee of Public Safety has the greatest confidence in Rossignol's talents and civic virtues'; then raising his voice, 'I declare,' he added, 'to the general officers around me, that even if Rossignol should lose twenty more battles, if he should experience twenty more defeats, he would nevertheless remain

the beloved child of the Revolution, and the eldest son of the Committee of Public Safety. We desire that he should be surrounded by generals of division capable of assisting him by their advice and by their insight. Woe to them should they lead him astray, for we shall look upon them alone as the authors of our reverses each time that we suffer any.' "

The words contained a manifest menace. The general-in-chief, like the King, could do no wrong. Should Rossignol err, it would be imputed to the advice of Kleber and his comrades.

Yet they were powerless to enforce their views, and, according to Savary, their chief was occupied rather with denouncing the officers under his command than with directing the movements of the troops. When Marceau dispatched messengers warning him that Angers was threatened by the royalist army, and demanding instructions, he remained obstinately silent, until the representatives shut up in that town sent to ask why no reinforcements had arrived there; when he attempted to shift the blame upon his young subordinate.

" Marceau was summoned," relates Kleber. " The scene became very animated, and though he was able easily to justify his conduct, they pretended not to listen to him. Rossignol, on the pretext of sickness, leaves the young general to face the representatives alone. At last, after many complaints, Prieur ends by saying to Marceau, ' For the rest, we are well aware that it is less your fault than that of Kleber, by whose advice you acted; and to-morrow we shall set up a tribunal and have him guillotined.' "

Informed forthwith by Marceau of the fate awaiting him, Kleber at once demanded an interview with

the representatives. It ended in a species of reconciliation, leaving the antagonists no better friends.

This condition of things in the republican camp is the sole explanation of the fact that the Vendean army was not more swiftly annihilated.

After a brief sojourn at Laval an attack upon Angers was in preparation. It was imagined, perhaps falsely, that, were it in their hands, the royalists would be enabled to cross the Loire and regain La Vendée. On November 28 Laval was left and the march towards Angers began.

The importance of its defence was fully realised by the republican authorities, and within the town garrison and citizens were busily making ready for it. General Beaupuy, in spite of the unhealed wound he had received at Laval, was hard at work, and in addition to the two resident representatives, Francastel and Esnüe-Lavallée, a third member of the Convention, Levasseur, had been sent to watch the attempts of the Vendeans to cross the Loire, and to frustrate them. Reinforcements—delayed by Rossignol's unaccountable supineness—were daily expected to reach the town.

On December 2 the royalist army was within two leagues of it. During their march thither the troops had met with little resistance, and were possessed by a false confidence that the town would be taken without difficulty. Yet there can have been from the first little real hope. The place was fortified, the garrison strong, the National Guard brave and determined, and popular enthusiasm such that women willingly faced the risk of conveying ammunition to the ramparts. It is true that Danican, holding the chief command, is charged, and it would seem justly,

with the design of playing into the hands of the besiegers, but his meditated treason, if such it was, was rendered innocuous by the watchfulness of Ménard, commandant of the place.

The Vendeans, for their part, as at Granville, were destitute of the necessary appliances for carrying the town by assault. Hardship and disease, too, had done their work, and the "admirable impetuosity" noted by Kleber was gone or showed itself only in transient flashes.

Nevertheless for fifty hours the struggle was kept up, La Rochejacquelein and his comrades doing all that men could do, in the face of insurmountable obstacles, to render it a success. Though at times it was impossible to nerve the peasants to advance upon enemies prepared at every point to receive them, the assault was again and again renewed. But again and again the royalists were repulsed. They had counted upon a hand-to-hand fight; to march up to the mouth of the cannon was more than, in their present condition, mental and physical, they dared.

"Where is the ardour that brought you to the Loire?" La Rochejacquelein cried, in anger and despair. "You are before Angers, which you undertook to capture at all cost. Fulfil your promises."

Reproaches were vain. The peasants might be roused for a moment to action; it was only to fall quickly back into their condition of discouragement and fear. All methods calculated to inspirit them were tried and tried in vain. Stofflet went so far as to promise them the pillage of the town, should it be taken. The old Vendean tradition endured, and the men shook their heads. God would punish

them should such a crime be committed, they said, and it would be just. And all the time it was the policy of the defenders to prolong the fight, knowing that reinforcements must reach them before long.

When a general attack had at length been accomplished, officer after officer fell, and still La Rochejacquelein refused to abandon the struggle, until the sound of fresh firing announced the arrival of the expected troops, and the republican general, Bouin de Marigny, fell upon the besiegers from behind.

It was well for Marigny that death was to overtake him in the field; for at Angers the order for his destitution awaited his arrival. The last scene in which he played a part is worth recording. Like Bonchamps, he was to die showing mercy to his enemy. The sudden attack from behind had thrown the Vendean troops into confusion, and Marigny had been met by the royalist cavalry, one of whom, Richard Duplessis, was carried by his horse into the midst of the enemy.

"I have just dipped my hands in the blood of a republican," he cried, riding up to Marigny. "I am half dead. Put an end to me!"

Something in the man—his courage and indifference—moved Marigny, and instead of giving him the death-blow he solicited, he threw him a handkerchief wherewith to staunch his wound.

"What makes you fight?" he asked.

"Our own defence," returned the other. "Would you not massacre us without pity?"

Marigny may have recognised that the plea was just. He sent Duplessis back to his comrades; La Rochejacquelein, not to be outdone, instantly responding by the release, fully equipped, of the only

two horsemen his men had captured.[1] Five minutes later Marigny himself was dead, struck by a cannon-ball.[2]

"*Chasseurs, achevez moi,*" were his last words, curiously echoing those of his late prisoner. They are recorded by Kleber with the remark that a glorious death spared him the disgrace the Government was on the point of inflicting. His crimes were that he was nobly born and humane. Dead, the Republic did not refuse him honour, and presented the horse he had ridden as a homage to his father.

Angers was saved. When, after the long fight, the Vendeans beat a retreat, their last reasonable hope of crossing the Loire was at an end. Within the town rejoicing was great, the prisoners who had been taken being all included in an indiscriminate slaughter. The wintry weather, misery and hunger, were likewise thinning the ranks of the royalists, and when a reconnoitring body of the Blues made an inspection of the surrounding plains, men, women, and children strewed the ground, rescued by death from further suffering.

Strange though it may appear, to the Vendeans defeat had been as unexpected as it was crushing. "Depending upon a quick and easy success," says Madame de La Rochejacquelein, describing the arrival before the town, "we were all heaped together in the suburbs. . . . I was so overcome with fatigue that I slept for several hours amid the noise of cannon.

[1] Beauchamp averred that Duplessis was spared in consideration of a promise to induce the cavalry to desert. This story is, on the face of it, unlikely, and was probably invented to explain the generosity of a republican.

[2] Deniau puts his death on the following day.

We were very near; the balls nearly reached us. . . . When I awoke the next morning, I got upon my horse without speaking to any one, to learn the news. I was informed and saw for myself that our soldiers would not attempt the assault, and that little hope remained. I seemed to have lost my head and yet went on. I met the Chevalier Desessarts coming back wounded. . . . Messieurs de Boispréau and Rinchs had been killed. . . . His recital and what I saw gave me a kind of desire to expose myself to the fire and to risk my life. . . . I had no more courage than usual, for I was excessively frightened, but my despair drove me on. . . . My father, who was in the hottest of the action, saw me from a distance and called to me to go back. I stopped irresolute. He sent a horseman, who took my horse's bridle and led me back. I felt a secret satisfaction in seeing myself out of the danger I had gone to seek. . . . I found my child in her nurse's arms."

What one woman has related, hundreds were suffering; as the siege of Angers was abandoned, and almost without definite aim or plan, the royalist army moved away.

This critical moment had been selected by the Minister of War for depriving Kleber of his command—a step that would have been of incalculable advantage to the Vendeans. But though the fact had been made privately known to the victim, Rossignol, in spite of his dislike and animosity, had not ventured to put the order in force, and denied to Marceau that it had reached him. On that same day Marceau himself, his youth notwithstanding, received the confirmation of his appointment to the post of provisional commander-in-chief of the armies of the west,

Rossignol being transferred to Brest and entrusted with the defence of the coast. Though the promotion of a man so much his junior was a deliberate slight upon Kleber, between him and Marceau there was no danger of rivalry. In the matter of command or military rank, he was totally devoid of personal ambition. On the battlefield he took the lead by natural right; the fight over, he was always ready to resume the subordinate position he seemed to prefer. Marceau, for his part, to whom the commandership-in-chief might have been expected to prove intoxicating, only consented to accept it on condition that Kleber should direct the plan of operations.

"I will retain all the responsibility," he told his friend privately, "only asking to command the vanguard in the time of danger. To you I leave the real command and the means to be used to save the army."

"Be content, *mon ami*," was Kleber's reply. "We will fight and get ourselves guillotined together"—a not improbable contingency, if the letter sent by Rossignol to the Minister of War before leaving Angers is taken into account. Of Kleber the departing general wrote that he was a good soldier, and understood the trade of war—a fact so patent that it could scarcely have been denied—"but he serves the Republic as he would serve a despot." Marceau, he said, was a little intriguer, buried in a clique, who would be lost through ambition and self-conceit, adding that he had served in the Germanic legion, the principles of which were more than open to suspicion: "In a word I am forced to say that he is disquieting to patriots, with whom besides he holds no intercourse." Other denunciations followed. Da-

mas, general of brigade, swore by the army of Mayence; Savary was closely associated with Marceau and Kleber. "The soldiers are good, but the chiefs are worthless, and in the name of the country I ask you to put a remedy to this disorder."

Thus Rossignol avenged himself upon the men who succeeded where he failed.

Meantime the march of the royalists had become a flight. A council of war was held at Suette, where the night of December 4 was passed, and a variety of plans were discussed. It is useless to review them, or consider the chances they might have afforded. As before, the peasants took the initiative. Morning saw them on the road to Baugé, destitute of definite purpose, objectless, despairing; but none the less determined to obey no will save their own. The chiefs had no choice save to follow and protect, so far as it was possible, the moving mass upon whose track the enemy was following, ready—for the pursuit was mainly conducted by Westermann—to kill without mercy whomsoever might fall out of the ranks.

What could be done La Rochejacquelein did. In every place where the eye of the commander-in-chief was most needed he was at hand. Piron asked and was given the post of danger as commander of the rearguard, and even now obtained an advantage over the Blues, driving them back after an engagement lasting five hours, so as to permit the royalists to rest when Baugé was reached. On the way thither Royrand, mortally wounded at Laval, died, happy, as he said, not to survive the royalist disasters. At Baugé he found a grave. There, too, La Rochejacquelein succeeded, surely with despair in his own heart,

in inspiring his troops with some faint hopes of salvation. As he spoke to them of their past triumphs, of a possible issue from the horrors of their present position, they listened to his voice as of old. "Their sick imagination recovered its calm; they suffered, but they suffered uncomplainingly."[1]

Food was lacking; the army was decimated by disease. All cattle, grain, forage that could be removed had been cleared from the path of the royalists, and on December 8 the army was once more on foot, on its way to La Flêche. Desertions had long been taking place, making a new and melancholy feature of the retreat. As Madame de Lescure was setting out on the march, accompanied by her husband's faithful aide de camp, the chevalier de Beauvolliers, his elder brother—the man who, with Talmont, had been charged with attempting to make his escape to England—came to thank her in emotional fashion for her care of his young brother, adding that he was most unhappy, his wife and daughter being at Angers, likely to die upon the scaffold, and he himself regarded with distrust. After which he took leave of brother and friend, and disappeared from the army, his conduct going far to corroborate the suspicions of which he complained. He had left his money and property in the military chest, and Madame de Lescure was loath to believe his flight to be deliberate. But the explanation he offered when the two met again fails to carry conviction.

On La Flêche being reached, it was found that the bridge over the small river Loir had been destroyed, and that a body of 3,000 or 4,000 Blues, under Chabot, were ranged on the opposite bank,

[1] Joly-Crétineau.

to oppose the crossing of the royalists. La Rochejacquelein again proved equal to the occasion. He discovered a ford at some distance, and by its means effected the passage of the river with 400 horsemen, carrying an equal number of infantry behind them. The garrison was thus surprised and driven out of the town; whilst La Rochejacquelein, recrossing the stream, went to strengthen the rearguard in its struggle with Westermann, already attacking it. He was once more victorious, and that evening the army entered the town, repairing at once to the church to give thanks for its deliverance. There sick and wounded were laid, and at midnight the altars were lit and Mass was said, the priests descending from time to time to give the parting benediction to the dying. Wet to the skin and chilled to the bone, thirty of these passed away during the night.

On the following day when the republican garrison returned to the attack, La Rochejacquelein was ready for them, and after four hours' fighting was again successful in driving them back. Pursuing them to Clermont, he was supported by few of his officers, and on his return to La Flêche he did not, for once, spare them reproaches.

"Messieurs," he said bitterly, "not only do you oppose me in the council, but you abandon me in the field."

Each such victory as that gained at La Flêche must have seemed, the circumstances taken into account, little less than amazing. Nor could they do more than prolong the agony of the perishing army—an army from whom its condition could no longer be concealed. In despair many of the peasants caught at the false hope held out by a proclamation declaring

that passports were for the future unnecessary for persons desiring to travel in the interior of the country; and, throwing away their guns, turned their steps, as simple wayfarers, towards the Loire, only to fall victims to Westermann and his soldiers.

On December 10 it was determined, after prolonged discussion, to proceed to Mans. It was time to be moving. As the royalists quitted La Flêche, having again demolished the bridge temporarily thrown over the river, the town was entered by Westermann, who had swum the river with some of his troops and was slaying the laggards he found on the route. At five in the afternoon of the same day Mans was reached, the resistance offered by some republican troops stationed there overcome, and the army, still numbering some 25,000 men, entered the town. In their hands were 200 or 300 prisoners, seized as the place was captured; and for a time it seemed likely that they would be slain. But some women, who had themselves been awaiting execution, used their freedom to implore pardon for the Blues, and their prayer was granted. If pillage took place, if "food, shirts, stockings, sabots, and clothes" were exacted, and other robberies committed, it can scarcely be cause for surprise. The question has been raised whether "several good citizens" were not shot. The inquiry, however, into the circumstances which took place in 1798 states that only a single soldier fell a victim, owing to his refusal to cry "*Vive le Roi!*"

To the wandering army, rest, whatever might come after, was welcome. Amongst the soldiers reigned the quiet of despair. "The hope of regaining La Vendée wrested from them, every one," says Madame

de La Rochejacquelein, " wished for death, but seeing this was certain, preferred to await it with resignation than to retard it by fighting."

The peasants, wounded and sick, longed to take repose in a town where food and drink were to be had, even though such rest, like sleep in the snow, might mean death. To starving men, wasted by disease, the very abundance of food was a snare, and having eaten and drunk to excess many fell into a condition of lethargy from which they could not be roused, or were overcome by the deep slumber of exhaustion.

The time allowed them was short. By the second day Westermann had arrived in hot pursuit and, in spite of orders to risk nothing by imprudence, was bent upon hastening the catastrophe. Muller, with 4,000 troops, supported him, and Marceau was at hand with 3,000 or 4,000 more. Worse than all, it was impossible to induce more than a fraction of the peasants to take part in the fight. Yet it seemed for a time that another was to be added to the tale of victories that had been won by the Vendeans against overwhelming odds. An attack led by Muller was repulsed; his men took flight in cowardly fashion; Westermann was driven back, and the affair might have ended ill for the republican forces had not Marceau hurried to the rescue, sending an urgent summons to Kleber to come to his support lest he should be caught in a trap.

The plan of attack had been in direct opposition to the policy of prudence always advocated by Kleber, and he did not hesitate to express his opinion of it.

" Marceau is young," he said when the message was brought him. " He has committed a fault. It is

well that he should feel it, but let us make haste to get him out of this."

As he hurried to the scene of action he met the flying republican troops, two of their generals at their head, who tacitly negatived the suggestion that they should attempt to rally the fugitives. By the time, however, that he reached the town the peril was practically over.

To follow the varying fortunes of the long struggle would take up too much space. When, after successfully repulsing the enemy La Rochejacquelein had reentered the town to muster the main body of the troops, he found them in a condition making a continued resistance hopeless. Some were drunk, others asleep in the streets or by the side of their guns. Not more than half their number could be induced to join in the inevitable fight. Such was the state of things when Westermann entered the town. Yet for long hours the struggle was kept up, the scene of terror and confusion enhanced by darkness as the December day closed and night came on. Talmont, with his ill-mounted cavalry, had met and repulsed the republican horsemen as they passed into the streets; Marigny had turned his cannon upon the enemy; riflemen kept up a continuous fire from the windows of the houses. Even when Marceau had arrived, his situation, surrounded by troops whose strength and resources were matter of conjecture, was precarious. On either side the combatants were overwhelmed by fatigue, Westermann himself, indefatigable, untiring, being forced to intermit his labours and to yield to sleep. As if by common consent a truce of four hours suspended the fight.

But as fresh republican troops reinforced those already in the town, it became clear that defeat could not be averted. In vain La Rochejacquelein sought to block the way to fugitives; in vain Stofflet swore and menaced; both were swept away by the flying crowd, Stofflet carrying with him the colours.

"If the Blues send these to the Convention," he said, "they will send with them my head."

As he passed on, a wounded woman, bearing her child in her arms, cried to him to save it. The rough soldier responded to the appeal. Wrapping the boy in the flag to shelter him from the bitter cold, he took him into his arms, and restored him safely to his mother on the morrow.

When, an hour before dawn, Kleber led his men into the town, no more than some few hundreds of the Vendeans remained there, gallant and devoted, to protect as best they could the retreat of the comrades who were flying, without preconcerted action, along the road to Laval. La Rochejacquelein brought up the rear and kept the pursuers under Westermann—now awake and at his usual murderous work—as far as was possible at bay.

With the vividness of an eye-witness Madame de Lescure tells the story of that flight, of her attempt to secure her baby's safety by hiding it in the bed of the republican lady, Madame Thoré, in whose house she had lodged, of the child being carried off in the end by a man who had been Lescure's servant and who cried, as he lifted her into the air, that he was saving his master's child.[1] She tells also of the meeting of friends and acquaintances on the road beyond the

[1] M. Chassin asserts that the child remained in the charge of Madame Thoré.

town, all involved in a common disaster and greeting one another almost with surprise.

"Some leagues from Mans I saw my father and M. de La Rochejacquelein arrive. . . . Henri came to me.

"'Ah, you are safe,' he said.

"'I thought you must have been dead,' I replied, 'since we are beaten.'

"He grasped my hand, saying, 'Would I were dead.'"[1]

In the town from which Madame de Lescure had escaped, others unhappily remained, prevented by one reason or another from joining the mass of non-combatants who had fled. Into the horrors said to have taken place in connection with them it is unnecessary to enter. Accounts differ; nor is there reason to doubt that the protests of Savary and—later—of Chassin against the exaggerated charges of brutality brought against the republicans may be justified. That Savary, as well as Kleber and Marceau, would have done their best in the cause of humanity is certain. The grenadiers of Armagnac and of Aunis, regiments with a high reputation for valour, likewise attempted to mitigate the sufferings of the vanquished and to afford them protection. But when every allowance has been made for exaggeration, there is no room for doubt that Mans was made into a shambles, or that the massacre of men and women was accompanied by sickening brutality. "It would be impossible," wrote Kleber, "to form a conception

[1] According to M. de Béjarry, aide de camp to General de Royrand, Madame de Lescure and Henri de La Rochejacquelein were in love with each other after her husband's death. Henri also dead, she married his brother Louis.

of the horrible carnage of that day, without taking into account the great number of prisoners of all ages, of both sexes, and of every condition of life."

The lust of blood had got the upper hand, and no exercise of authority could avail to bridle the spirit of violence and cruelty abroad and encouraged by Westermann, by the mayor of Mans and by the representatives of the people. Paris was enduring the reign of terror, and the atmosphere prevailing there was not confined to the capital. Westermann was proud of the title " the butcher of Vendeans," which had been conferred upon him; and no minimising of the facts can render the day of the victory at Mans otherwise than one of those that are a blot upon the republican cause.

CHAPTER XXIII

December

After Mans—Mademoiselle des Melliers—March towards the Loire continued—At Ancenis—Failure to cross the river—Desertions—At Savenay—Final dispersion.

Whilst the butchery was going forward within the town, a veritable massacre was taking place upon the road to Laval and in the country round. Although the river was still the goal of the fugitives, little hope of crossing it could be reasonably entertained, with Kleber practically directing the republican movements, eagerly seconded by the zeal of the nominal commander-in-chief, and by the fierce and untiring activity of Westermann, in charge of the pursuit.

Terror lent the royalists wings, and their flight was made so swiftly as, in some degree, to distance the enemy; the rearguard turning now and then to face the pursuers and to gain a breathing time for the main body of the army. But death was upon their track, might overtake them at any moment, whether they kept to the road or sought shelter in by-paths, morasses, or woods. It was true that many of the country-folk braved danger by acts of mercy performed towards the fugitives, some doubtless actuated by sympathy with the royalist cause, more perhaps from motives of pure humanity; and it is

said that the scenes witnessed at this time by peasants and farmers were graven on their memory, a legend of sorrow and pity, touched with something of the supernatural.

On the other hand, many of the inhabitants of these districts rose to join in the terrible human chase. "The peasants made a general battue," wrote Benaben, "in the woods and farms, and massacred more than we ourselves had slain." To give the exact number of the Vendean losses would be impossible; but it has been roughly calculated that 5,000 men had died in Mans, 3,000 during the flight, and that from 7,000 to 8,000 old men, women and children, with sick and wounded, were slain as they fled. The road to Laval was strewn with the dead.

As to the degree to which the authorities were responsible for the horrors of those days it is again difficult to pronounce with certainty, nor is it easy to distinguish between fact and fable in the records that remain. The official bulletin dispatched to the Convention by its representatives, though couched in the usual exaggerated language, must, however, be accepted as approximately true, and the picture it presents is sufficiently dark, without the details supplied by royalist writers.

"Chiefs, marquises, countesses, priests in abundance," wrote Bourbotte and Prieur from Mans, ". . . all have fallen into our hands; and heaps of corpses are the sole obstacles placed in the way of our pursuit by the enemy. The streets, the houses, public places, roads, are strewn with them, and after fifteen hours the massacre is still going on. . . . The whole army is chasing this horde."

The civilians were infinitely more bloodthirsty

and merciless than the soldiers, and it was they who hounded on the common soldiery to deeds of violence, sure of the support of the Parisian authorities. In describing his efforts to save the life and honour of a girl of eighteen found wandering alone in Mans, Savary adds that Kleber and Marceau might have been compromised had they been aware of them, and it was accordingly only when Mans and the representatives had been left behind that he made Mademoiselle des Melliers known to them, "in whose fate they took all the interest she deserved." With little leisure to spare, both Kleber and Marceau appear to have entered eagerly into Savary's plans for affording this one girl protection. "Never," observes Kleber in his *Mémoires*, "was there a prettier woman, more graceful or in every way more interesting." Marceau, round whose share in the affair a romance, legendary or real, has been woven, visited, in the midst of his labours as commander-in-chief, the place of refuge found for her. All proved vain. Some days later, the army having moved on, the girl was discovered in her retreat and thrown into prison, and on January 22 she was executed, entrusting, it is said, her watch to the executioner to be sent to Marceau as a token of gratitude and remembrance.

Arrived at Laval, La Rochejacquelein reviewed the forces remaining to him, and found that nearly all the artillery had fallen into the hands of the enemy and that no munitions of war remained. Yet some thousands of fighting men were left, and as he set the army again in motion, the women and wounded in the centre, he refused to abandon hope. One course alone was open to the royalist army. The Loire or the guillotine were the sole alternatives—so La Roche-

jacquelein told Beauvais when the two met at Laval.[1]

Towards the Loire they therefore moved on. The vanquished have few friends, and as they left Laval the women of the town fell upon the rearguard and sought to disarm them, till La Rochejacquelein, turning back, rode through the streets, threatening to set the place on fire.[2]

Craon was the next stage, the enemy close behind, notwithstanding which it was necessary to leave some of the sick and dying behind, who, no more than those scattered over the country or fallen out of the march, could look for mercy from the Blues. From Alençon the representative Garnier sent his report to the Committee of Public Safety, marked by a terrible explicitness. "Prisoners are brought to us thirty at a time," he wrote. "It takes three hours to try them, in four they are shot, for fear that should too many of these plague-stricken people be in the town, they should leave there the germs of their epidemic malady. I have given the order to raise the districts wherein these scoundrels are scattered, committing all sorts of depredations. . . . It has produced excellent results. They are hunted like wild beasts, and as many of them are killed as are made prisoners."

On December 16 Ancenis was reached. The Loire lay at length before the eyes of the men who had strained every nerve to reach it, and beyond the Loire the promised land—home. At the sight of the river, hope, so hardly extinguished, reawakened within the wayfarers. They would die, if die they must, if only the end might come in no strange

[1] *Mémoires*, Beauvais. [2] *Ibid.*

land, but in La Vendée. Yet how was that eager multitude to be conveyed to the opposite bank? Every vessel upon which the enemy could lay hands had been removed from Ancenis as well as from every spot available for a crossing, and two small boats—one of them brought on a wagon from a pond—were all the means of transport at hand. Nor was this all. On the southern shore was Saint-Florent, and Saint-Florent was occupied by a body of republican troops.

The attempt to cross was, in spite of all, to be made. On the other side of the water lay four large vessels, loaded with hay; and La Rochejacquelein decided to make the perilous crossing in person, to seize them in the teeth of the enemy and to send them back to the northern bank, himself waiting to receive the soldiers as they were brought over, and to prevent them disbanding as they landed. Rafts were hastily knocked together the while, to provide additional means of transport. Bernier the priest preached whilst the work went on, to quiet the peasants and to preserve order.

All was to be in vain. La Rochejacquelein, with Stofflet and some few soldiers, gained the opposite bank, and by some miracle escaped death. But the republican guns were directed towards the landing-place; the soldiers were dispersed and fled; a gun-boat, firing upon the rafts, sank many of them,[1] and though it is said that the four vessels were eventually carried over to the other side, it was clear that to effect a general crossing was impossible. Worse than all, La Rochejacquelein, unable to make his way back, was finally separated from his army. For close

[1] Some say they could never be floated.

upon three months he wandered about La Vendée, raising what troops he could, and carrying on, not without success, a guerilla warfare. On March 4, 1794, came the inevitable end. An attack had been made on Trémentine and two republican grenadiers had been taken. When they were to have been put to death, La Rochejacquelein interposed.

"Surrender," he said, moving forward. "You shall have your lives."

As he spoke, one of the men turned and fired. The ball struck him on the brow, and he fell dead. He was not yet twenty-two.

Amongst the troops he had been forced to abandon confusion and consternation reigned. Stofflet, only second to him in power and influence, was likewise lost to them; and when the arrival of fresh gunboats from Nantes made the position hopeless, the despair of the peasants found open vent, in spite of Marigny's attempts to calm them.

"Follow me," he cried. "I will lead you to Paimbœuf and take you across the Loire."

Only sobs answered him; and when he further asserted that La Rochejacquelein and Stofflet were dead and it was vain to count upon them, his words did no more than add to the universal grief, soldiers, women, children, all remaining motionless upon the shore.[1]

There was no time to lose. The passage of the river was barred. Westermann was at the gates, only repulsed by a desperate charge, headed by Talmont, Forestier, Marigny, and Donnissan. Some of the peasants, preferring to trust themselves to the river, flung themselves into the water, clinging

[1] Deniau, from the account of an eyewitness.

to pieces of wood or whatever wreckage came to hand. Others stayed on the shore; some listening to false proffers of amnesty held out by Westermann's agents repaired to Nantes, there to meet their death, others prepared for another fight for life, all exhausted and terrified. From a dispatch sent by Carrier on December 20 to the Convention it appears that some few safe-conducts had been issued by General Moulin to those who sought to return home in peace. Had this not been done, said Carrier in exasperation, not one of the peasants who had crossed the river—some swimming and unarmed—would have escaped. "I have just dispatched the order for the arrest of this truly guilty general," he added. "He is already replaced."

Some 7,000 men were still ready to continue the struggle, but they were worn out by hardship and, many of them, by disease. Marching under the royalist flag they left Ancenis. At Nort a further misfortune was to overtake them in the departure of several officers, some setting out to join an insurgent body reported to be in the forest of Gâvre; whilst others—their names are charitably withheld by Madame de La Rochejacquelein—had become so lost to a sense of honour, that, after dividing amongst them what was left of the public money, they abandoned their posts.

The small remnant clinging together were hourly thinned by death or desertion. It is fair to remember that the time was come when leaders and men, however true and loyal, might excusably consider that each was at liberty to take what steps might seem to offer a chance of escape from their approaching doom, and enable them to do further service to

the cause they had embraced. A certain number, faithful to the last, remained to meet death shoulder to shoulder, and it must have been a bitter thing to find themselves forsaken.

Amongst those who quitted the army was Forestier, who, with a body of young men, succeeded in joining Puisaye—in arms near Rennes—and the Prince de Talmont, who had resented, it would seem, the fact that when it became necessary to name a new commander-in-chief, the choice fell upon Fleuriot, Charette's uncle, rather than upon himself. Marigny, Piron, Lyrot, Donnissan, with others, elected to share the fate of the army.

At Blain the pursuers came up with the pursued and an attack was projected, but, profiting by a delay in beginning it, Fleuriot evacuated the town by night, to take the road to Savenay, in the hope that, in Breton territory, there might be a chance of succour. It was a fatal move. Placed between the sea, the Loire, and the river Vilaine, and with marshes to the right, it was a place that afforded no further means of escape.

Cold and wet—it was raining hard—the unhappy Vendeans entered their last place of refuge, the small garrison having withdrawn at their approach. They were closely followed by the republican troops. Kleber, Marceau, Westermann, were all at hand; Beaupuy, still disabled by his wound, was present as a spectator of this last act of a drama in which he had played his part gallantly and well.

The royalist troops, who had at first occupied two woods in front of the town, were soon forced to fall back upon the town itself, the vanguard of the enemy guarding the exits from it. The result of

the coming conflict was a foregone conclusion, recognised by the Vendean chiefs. The end of the long struggle had come.

"They placed me on a horse without my knowing why," relates Madame de La Rochejacquelein. "I was going to dismount, uncertain where I should go, when I heard M. de Marigny's voice. . . . He took the bridle of my horse, and without a word led me to the corner of the square. Then he said in a low voice, 'It is all over; we are lost. To-morrow's attack cannot be resisted; in twelve hours the army will be exterminated. I hope to die. Try to escape. Save yourself during this night. Farewell, farewell.'"[1]

The next moment he had left her, and was speaking in tones of encouragement to the soldiers. Of Donnissan, her father, she took a last leave.

"My duty is to remain with the army so long as it exists," he said, as he sat leaning his head on his hand and arranging for the escape of his wife and daughter. By neither was he seen again.

Night had fallen and firing was going on. In the republican camp some confusion had been caused by the arrival of the representatives, Prieur and Turreau, desirous of hastening the movements of the generals.

"*Allons*, comrades," cried Prieur, "forward, forward!" rousing Kleber to the fierce impatience of the man at the wheel when interfered with.

"If you do not take upon yourself to stop these *criailleries*," he said to Marceau, "we shall be at Nantes to-morrow with the enemy following us."

Marceau took the hint.

"Prieur," he said firmly, "this is not your place.

[1] *Mémoires*, Madame de La Rochejacquelein.

MARQUIS DE DONNISSAN.
From a print in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Your presence can be of no use ; and you are exposing yourself very inopportunely to be struck by a ball or by shot," whereupon the two civilians wisely withdrew, leaving the direction of affairs to the proper authorities. To Westermann's characteristic suggestion that the entire charge of the attack should be left to him, Kleber's reply was equally uncompromising. Having begun the business so well, he was not disposed, he said, to leave it to another man to finish.

That night—of December 22—was one of leave-taking in the Vendean camp. Seven thousand men awaiting the attack of 20,000 left little uncertainty as to the result. Yet all prepared to sell their lives dear. Weapons were repaired ; old men and wounded made ready to take their part in the fight ; and at eight on the morning of December 23 the final conflict began. A cold rain was falling as the Vendeans, taking the initiative, made their first charge, driving back the vanguard commanded by Duverger. As Kleber met the latter and his grenadiers in flight, Duverger made shamefaced excuse.

" General, we have no more cartridges," he cried, justifying his retreat.

" Did we not agree yesterday that we would crush them with the bayonet ? " was Kleber's indignant rejoinder, as he ordered the men back to their post, with a promise of support.

The issue of the fight could not be otherwise than certain. Pressed on all sides, the Vendeans fled where flight was possible, to be pursued by each of the several republican columns. The Loire on one side, marshland on the other, no retreat was practicable for any large body of men. " The carnage became

horrible," writes Kleber; "nothing was to be seen save piles of corpses." As for the prisoners, "the representatives of the people had them tried by revolutionary tribunals, and France and Europe are acquainted with the atrocities practised upon these unhappy men." Thus Kleber curtly summarises the sequel.

It was not the fault of Bernard de Marigny that he survived the battle. Fierce and ruthless in time of success, if he was prompt to sacrifice the lives of other men, he never shrank from risking his own. Again and again he returned to the charge. Fleuriot, Donnissan, all did their duty, as they fought on in a battle they knew to be lost. Lyrot fell. Piron, a familiar figure to the enemy and conspicuous on the white horse from which he refused to part, died at his post. Then Marigny's voice, loud and clear, was heard above the din of the fight.

"Women, save yourselves," he cried. "All is lost." A broken sword in his hand, he continued to do all that was possible to gain time for them. The road to Guérande was still open. Placing two cannon he had kept in reserve across it, he waited with twenty gunners to beat back the troops in pursuit and thus to secure a respite for the fugitives. In the end few were saved. Every spot that could afford shelter or refuge was explored; even the marshes were searched lest any might be found there in hiding.

None—such were the orders of the representatives—were to be spared. Of the spirit in which, by some of the soldiers, their orders were executed, the letter addressed by General Tribout to the Minister of War is eloquent. Set to guard the passage of the river Vilaine, he boasted that none had been

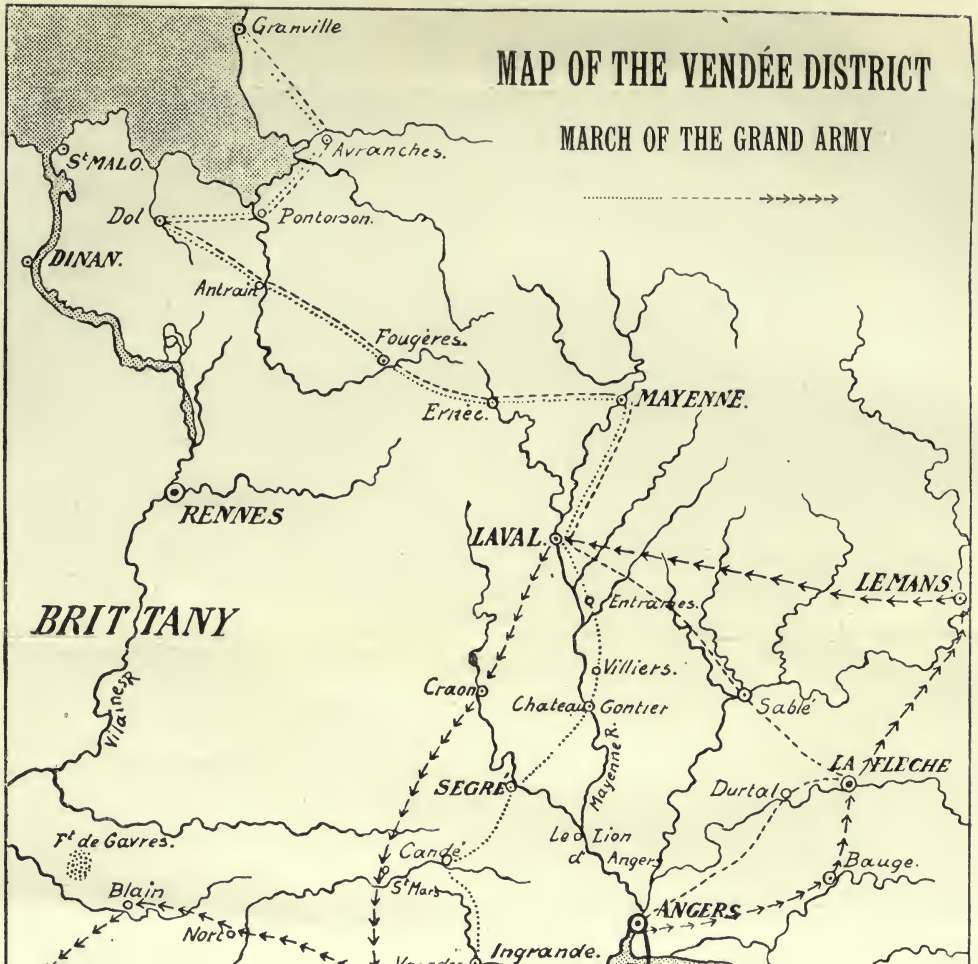
permitted to cross, adding, "I will have no prisoners. They would bring the plague into our army, and when men hold their principles, they should not remain alive." Westermann's report was of the same nature. La Vendée was dead, with its women and children, nor had he a single prisoner with whom to reproach himself. ". . . Shooting is going on ceaselessly at Savenay, for brigands arrive every minute to give themselves up as prisoners. Kleber and Marceau are not here. . . ."

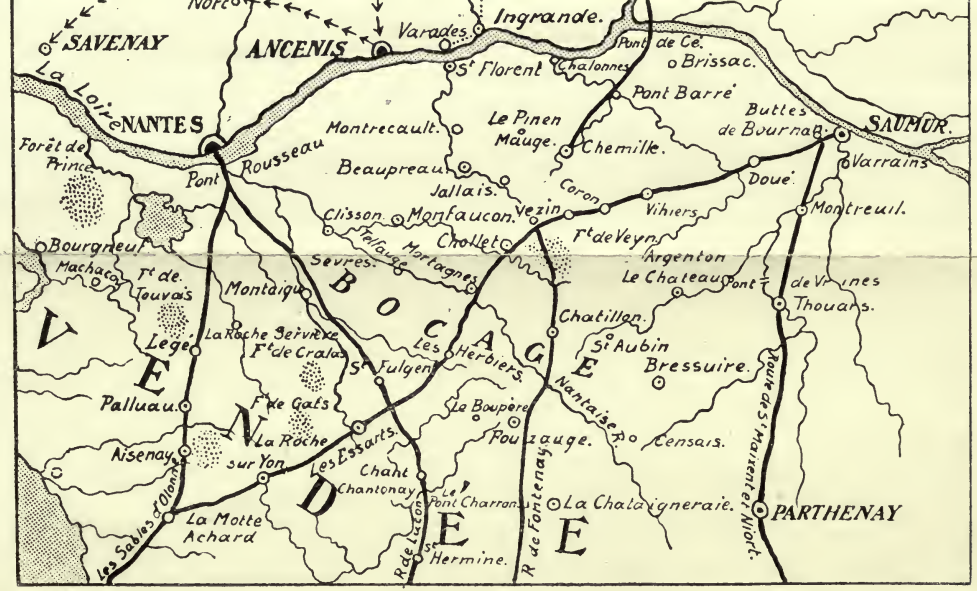
The last sentence is significant. Had Westermann's superior officers been at hand, his bloody work would not have gone on unchecked.

The story of the Grande Armée is told. It had ceased to exist. Here and there isolated groups might elude the vigilance of the men engaged in hunting them down; individuals might be saved through the generous charity of the Bretons who incurred the risk of ruin and death rather than deliver them up to their enemies; others, making their difficult way back to La Vendée might raise once more the standard of revolt; but the Grande Armée, the army of Cathelineau, of d'Elbée, Bonchamps, Lescure, La Rochejacquelein, and the rest, had passed away. The tribute paid by Kleber's friend and comrade, General Beaupuy, to the character of the men he had fought and conquered and admired may fitly close the history of a magnificent failure:

"This army," he wrote to Merlin after its final dispersion—"this army of which you saw the remains from the terrace at Saint-Florent, had once more become formidable by the accessions it had received in the invaded departments. I have watched it

well, have examined it closely. I have even recognised faces I had seen at Chollet and at Laval; and by their countenances and their bearing I assure you nothing was wanting to the soldiers save the uniform. Troops that have fought Frenchmen such as these may expect also to conquer nations cowardly enough to combine against a single nation and in the cause of royalty. . . . In short, I know not if I am mistaken; but to me this war of peasants, of brigands, which has been so greatly ridiculed and treated with contempt . . . has always seemed the great test of the Republic, and it appears to me that to fight with our other foes will be no more than child's play."


MAP OF THE VENDÉE DISTRICT
MARCH OF THE GRAND ARMY
Granville
Avranches.
St MALO.
Dol
Pontorson.
DINAN.
Antrain
Fougères.
Ernée.
MAYENNE.
RENNES
LAVAL.
LEMANS.
Entrames.
BRITTANY
Villiers.
Craon
Chateau Gontier
Sable
Vilaine R.
Mayenne R.
LA FLECHE
SEGRE
Durtal
Le Lion d'Angers
Ft de Gavres.
Candé
Bauge.
Blain
St Mars
ANGERS
Nort
Ingrande.



SAVENAY
ANCENIS
Varades
Ingrande
Pont de Cé
Brissac
St Florent
Chalonnes
Pont Barré
La Loire
NANTES
Montrecault
Le Pinen
Mauge
Chemille
Buttes de Bournan
SAUMUR
Forêt de Prince
Pont Rousseau
Beaupreau
Jallais
Varrains
Doué
Coron
Vihiers
Montreuil
Clisson
Monfaucon
Vezin
Bourgneuf
Tellauge
Mortagnes
Chollet
Ft de Veyn
Argenton
Machacon
Ft de Touvais
Sevres
Le Chateau
Pont de Vrines
Montaigu
Thouars
BOCAGE
Chatillon
Lege
La Roche Servière
Ft de Cralas
Les Herbiers
St Aubin
Bressuire
VENDÉE
St Fulgent
Nantaise R.
Palluau
Ft de Gats
Le Boupère
Fouzauge
Censais
Aisenay
La Roche sur Yon
Les Essarts
Chant Chantonay
Le Pont Charron
La Chataigneraie
PARTHENAY
Les Sables d'Olonne
La Motte Achard
R de Luçon
St Hermine
R de Fontenay
Route de St Maixent et Niort

PRINCIPAL AUTHORITIES

C. L. Chassin : *La Vendée patriote.*

Savary : *Guerres des Vendéens et des Chouans.*

Joly-Crétineau : *Histoire de la Vendée militaire.*

Amédée de Bájarry : *Souvenirs Vendéens.*

F. J. Grille : *La Vendée en* 1793.

Mémoires de la Marquise de La Rochejacquelein.

Deniau : *Histoire de la Guerre de la Vendée.*

Aubertin : *Mémoires.*

Boutillier de Saint-André : *Mémoires.*

Louis Marie Turreau : *Memoirs for the History of the War of La Vendée.*

Le Comte Pajol : *Kléber : Sa Vie et sa Correspondance.*

Mémoires sur la Vendée, containing : " Les Mémoires inedites d'un ancien Administrateur militairedes Armées républicaines," " Mémoires de Madame de Sapinaud," etc.

Maurice Duvignet : *Souvenirs.*

Mémoires de la Marquise de Bonchamps.

Comtesse de la Bouere : *Mémoires inedits de Bertrand Poirier de Beauvais, Commandant-Général de l'Artillerie des Armées de la Vendée.*

Bittard des Portes : *Charette et la Guerre de la Vendée.*

INDEX

A

AGRA, the false Bishop of, 77–79, 94, 124, 152 ; unveiled, 229
Amailloux, pillaged and burnt, 127
Angers, occupied by the Grande Armée, 113 ; siege of, 291 *seq.*
Argognes, chevalier d', 217
Artois, comte d', 155 ; his letter to the duc d'Harcourt, 262
Aubert-Dubayet, General, commander of the army of Mayence, 151, 165 ; suspended, 188 ; 189, 190, 241, 242, 243, 275
Autichamps, d', joins the Grande Armée, 111 ; 218, 260 *note*

B

Baco, mayor of Nantes, 116, 118, 121, 144, 145
Balard, executed, 43, 44
" Bande Noire," the, 264
Barbotin, the priest, 29, 43, 44
Bard, General, 203
Barère, 97, 98, 148
Baudriau, Mdlle de, 137, 138
Beauchamp, A., 294 *note*
Beauharnais, vicomte de, 134
Beaupréau, retreat of the royalists to, after battle of Chollet, 212 *seq.*
Beaupuy, General, 151, 189, 191 ; at battle of Chollet, 207, 208, 210 ; 234 ; wounded, 239 ; at siege of Angers, 291 ; at Savenay, 313 ; his tribute to the Grande Armée, 317, 318
Beauvais, Poirier de, 141, 159, 200, 201, 213, 260 *note*, 268, 272, 279, 309
Beauveau, marquis de, 29–32
Beauvolliers, royalist intendant-general, 188, 291 ; leaves the army, 298
Beauvolliers, the chevalier de, 69, 178, 255, 298
Béjarry, Amedée de, 78, 161, 304 *note*
Benaben, 307
Bernier, the Abbé, 20, 94, 95, 136, 156, 176, 229, 247, 258, 259, 310
Berruyer, General, 53, 54, 55 ; recalled, 56 ; 62, 63
Berthier, General, 103
Beysser, General, 115, 116, 121, 122, 145, 176, 179, 180
Biron, duc de, 62, 81, 98, 99, 125, 126, 127 ; recalled, 131
Blosse, General, 214 ; killed, 239
Bodin, quoted, 6
Boispréau, 295
Bonchamps, Vendean General, 48 ; his past, and his character, 50, 51, 56 ; his château burnt, 63 ; at Thouars, 71 *seq.* ; at Fontenay, 86 ; wounded, 87 ; 91, 100, 107, 108, 109, 117, 129, 139, 143, 153, 173, 174 ; fights at Torfou, 178, 179 ; unsupported by royalists, 181, 182 ; defeated, 184, 185 ; 186, 188, 191, 193, 198, 200, 201 ; at battle of Chollet, 206 ; mortally wounded, 209 ; 213 ; saves the prisoners, 218 ; his death, 219
Bonchamps, Madame de, 51, 217, 219, 279
Bon-Saint-André, M., 276
Bouëre, La, 73
Boulard, General, 83, 149
Bourbotte, representative, 288, 307
Bourdon, representative, 130, 165
Boursault, representative, 221
Boutillier de Saint-André, M., 100, 140, 197, 198
Bouveray, republican officer, his protest, 168

Bressuire, attacked, 17 ; Lescures in confinement at, 65 *seq.* ; royalists in possession of, 70 *seq.*
Brin, the curé, 95
Brulé, National commissioner, 149, 150
Bulkeley, Madame de, at Charette's camp, 171

C

Canclaux, republican General, 115, 121, 175, 179, 180 ; recalled, 186, 187, 189, 190, 275
Carrier, representative, 189, 191, 206, 207, 250, 312
Cathelineau, Jacques, first Vendean leader, 5, 9, 24, 29, 48, 49 ; at Thouars, 71 *seq.* ; rallies the peasants, 82, 83 ; 91, 100, 102 ; commander-in-chief, 109 ; 110, 111, 122 ; killed at Nantes, 123 ; 139
Cathelineau, Joseph, examined and executed, 34, 35
Cathelineau, Pierre, 226
Chabot, 298
Chalbos, General, 80, 81, 191, 194, 204, 237, 242, 243
Chalonnes, town of, seized, 41
Championnière, Charette's lieutenant, 91
Charette, Marié-Anne, 171, 172
Charette de la Contrie, the chevalier, 19 *seq.* ; joins the royalists, 21, 22, 27 ; 87 ; relations with other royalist chiefs, 90 *seq.* ; 114 ; at the siege of Nantes, 119 *seq.* ; 142, 143 ; fights at Luçon, 156 *seq.* ; 165 ; driven from Légé, 171 *seq.* ; joins with the Grande Armée, 175 *seq.* ; at Torfou, 177 *seq.* ; at Saint-Fulgent, 183 ; disputes with Grande Armée, 183 *seq.* ; abandons Grande Armée, 184, 185, 186 ; is appealed to, 196, 197 ; 226, 227
Chasseurs du Midi, their gallantry, 73, 74
Châtaignerie, La, captured, 79, 80
Chateaubriand, sees Vendean peasant in London, 263
Châtillon, town of, first seized by rebels, 17 ; council sits there, 94, 127 ; captured by republicans, 192 ; taken by royalists and retaken by republicans, 193 *seq.*
Chemillé, seized, 25 ; fight at, 53, 98
Cheton, 239
Chevardier, republican officer, 178, 179
Chollet, riots at, 23 ; captured by royalists, 29 *seq.* ; 98, 173 ; battle of, 203 *seq.*
Chouan, Jean, 233, 238, 281
Choudieu, representative, 133
Cottereau. *See* Chouan
Courgeon, M., 219
Courtois, 168
Coustard, General, 102, 103, 122

D

Danican, General, 244 *note*, 275, 291
Dehargues, royalist officer, 284 and *note*
Dembarrère, General, 189, 208
Deniau, the Abbé, frequently quoted
Desessarts, the chevalier, 58, 96, 152, 201, 212, 295
Dol, battle of, 277 *seq.*
Dommaigné, General, 102
Donnissan, Madame de, 59, 65, 228
Donnissan, marquis de, 48, 59, 65, 93, 114, 142, 295, 304, 311, 313, 314, 316
Dresnay, marquis de, 261
Duchaffault, a boy, 157
Duhoux, the elder, 175
Duhoux, the younger, 175
Dumouriez, General, 2
Dundas, 154, 261
Duplessis, Richard, 293, 294 *note*

E

Elbée, the marquis d', 44, 48 ; his past and his character, 52, 53 ; at Thouars, 71 ; wounded, 82 ; 91, 100, 107, 108 ; made commander-in-chief, 139 *seq.* ; 153, 154, 156, 157, 158, 159, 168, 174, 175 ; fights at Torfou, 178 ; 181, 185 ; defeated at Tiffauges, 187, 188 ; 191, 201 ; at battle of Chollet, 206 *seq.* ; mortally wounded, 209 ; finally separated from the Grande Armée, 213,

222 ; takes refuge with Charette, 226, 227 ; his execution at Noirmoutiers, 227 *note*
Esnüe Lavallée, representative, 230, 246, 291

F

Fayau, representative, 226
Flêche, La, royalists at, 113, 298–300
Fleuriot, General, 266 ; last commander-in-chief, 313, 316
Florent, Saint-, rises in rebellion, 23 ; royalist army at, 214 ; La Rochejacquelein crosses the river to, 310
Fontenay, first battle of, 82 ; second battle of, 85, 86 ; 97
Forestier, Vendean officer, 69, 79, 111, 112, 121, 134, 215, 311, 313
Fourcroy, the chemist, 164
Francastel, representative, 291
Fulgent, Saint-, taken by Vendeans, 183

G

Gainou, Dr., 283
Gallois, his report on La Vendée, 14 *seq.*
Garnier, representative, 309
Gauvilliers, 67
Gensonné, his report on La Vendée, 14 *seq.*
George III., King, 261
Goupilleau, representative, 88, 130, 165
Grammont, comedian, 133
Grille, Fr., quoted, 40, 72
Grimeau, M. Emile, 161 *note*

H

Harcourt, the duc d', comte d' Artois' letter to, 262
Haxo, General, 191, 207, 265
Hébert, 163
Hilaire, Saint-, emigrant, 229
Hugo, Victor, quoted, 4

J

Jagault, Père, a Benedictine, 95, 138, 188
Jallais, seized by the rebels, 25
Joly, leader in Lower Vendée, 91, 92
Joly-Crétineau—often quoted
Jomini, his opinion of La Rochejacquelein, 240

K

Kleber, General, 12 ; sent to La Vendée, 150 ; 151, 165 ; at Torfou, 176, 177 ; defeated, 179, 185 *note* ; victorious at Tiffauges, 187, 189, 190, 191, 203 ; at Chollet, 204–11 ; 215, 224, 225 ; at battle of Laval, 234 *seq.* ; his soldiers, 241, 242, 245 ; 250, 265, 276, 277, 281, 282, 284 ; 289 ; threatened with the guillotine, 290 ; 294, 295, 296, 297 ; at Mans, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305 ; in pursuit of Vendeans, 306, 308 ; at Savenay, 314–17

L

Laplanche, representative, 274, 284
La Tremblaye, château of, Lescure wounded at, 198 ; Léchelle at, 204
Laval, the Grande Armée at, 231 *seq.* ; battle of, 234–41
Le Carpentier, General, at Granville, 266, 268
Léchelle, republican commander-in-chief, 189, 198 ; his incompetency, 203 ; 204, 205, 206, 207, 208 ; at Laval, 235 *seq.* ; 241 ; retires, 243 ; and dies, 244
Lecoz, Bishop, 272, 273
Lenoir, General, 251
Lescure, Madame de, 57, 59, 65, 66, 67, 70, 82, 152, 154, 199 *seq.*, 228, 230, 236, 253–55, 277, 294, 295, 298, 301, 303, 304, 314
Lescure, marquis de, 5, 48 ; at his château of Clisson, 58 *seq.* ; in confinement at Bressuire, 65–67 ; joins the rebels, 68, 69 ; at Thouars, 71 *seq.* ; at Fontenay, 85 *seq.* ; 91 ; his proclamation, 93, 94 ; at battle of Saumur, 102 *seq.* ; interview with Quétineau, 105, 107, 110 ; his château destroyed, 127 ; 128, 129, 130, 134, 139, 143, 152, 153, 154 ; at Luçon, 156, 158, 160 ; 162, 168 ; at Tiffauges, 175 ; 176 *note* ; 182, 187, 191, 192 ; mortally wounded, 198 *seq.* ; 203, 206, 213 ; opposes the passage of the Loire, 215, 217, 218 ; carried across, 219 ; 220, 222, 223, 227, 230, 247, 248 ; dying, 253 ; death, 254, 255

Les Herbiers, seized by rebels, 28
Levasseur, representative, 291
Ligonnier, General, 38, 62, 81
Loire, the Grande Armée crosses it, 215 *seq.*
Louis XVI., his execution, 1
Louis XVII., 41
Luçon, battle at, 156 *seq.*
Lyrot, General, 124, 179, 184, 185, 220, 313; killed, 316

M

Machecoul, first outbreak at, 18, 114
Maignen, representative, 88
Mans, royalist army at, 300–305
Marat, 145
Marcé, General, defeated and executed, 40
Marceau, General, 203, 207, 208, 234, 278, 281, 282, 288, 289, 290; named provisional commander-in-chief, 295, 296; 297; at Mans, 301, 302, 304; 308; at Savenay, 313, 314; 317
Marie Antoinette, her execution, 227, 254
"Marie-Jeanne," a piece of cannon, 70, 82, 85
Marigny, Bernard de, 58, 100, 129, 130, 134, 152, 230, 259, 279, 311; at Savenay, 314, 316
Marigny, Bouin de, 282; killed at Angers, 293, 294
Marseillais at Bressuire, 66
Mayence, army of, sent to La Vendée, 150 *seq.*
Melliers, Mdlle des, 308
Ménard, commandant of Angers, 292
Menou, General, 62, 101, 102
Merlin, representative, 189, 220, 221, 224, 226, 317
Mesnard, wounded at Nantes, 121
Meuris, 144
Michelet, quoted, 4, 6, 20, 39, 116, 145
Miezkowski, General, 183
Mondyon, chevalier de, 69, 162
Monet, executed, 162, 163
Montaigu, town of, 180, 181
Mortagne, town of, taken by royalists, 29; 64, 98, 192; taken by republicans, 203
Moulin, General, 312
Muller, General, 281, 301

N

Nantes, threatened by royalists, 114 *seq.*; its heroism, 119; siege of, 121–24
Napoleon, the Emperor, quoted, 5, 61, 74, 109, 136
Noirmoutiers, taken by Charette, 226; d'Elbée at, 227; d'Elbée executed at, *ibid. note*
Nouvion, General, 288

O

Obenheim, republican prisoner, 259, 260

P

Parthenay, seized by royalists, 127
Peyre, General, 267
Philipeaux, representative, 145
Pie, Monseigneur, 58 *note*
Piron, Vendean leader, 111, 174, 220, 297, 313; killed at Savenay, 316
Pitt, William, 152, 261
Prieur, representative, 249, 282, 288, 289, 290, 307, 314, 315
Prigent, royalist agent, 269 *note*
Puisaye, M. de, 251, 313
Putaud, Dr., commands the Breton contingent, 257

Q

Quétineau, General, 38, 66, 67, 70 *seq.*, 76, 102, 104, 105, 110, 111

R

Rinchs, M., 295
Robert, 110
Robespierre, 164, 168, 283
Rochefoucauld, Madame de la 91, 171, 172
Rochejacquelein, Henri de La, 5, 43, 56; becomes a Vendean chief, 57 *seq.*; 65, 69; at Thouars, 71 *seq.*; 82; at Fontenay, 85 *seq.*; 100, 101; at battle of Saumur, 102 *seq.*; 105, 107, 112, 127, 128, 129, 134, 135, 139, 140; at Luçon, 158, 160; 162, 168, 191, 192, 193; at battle of Chollet, 204 *seq.*; opposes the passage of the Loire, 212 *seq.*; made commander-in-chief, 223, 224; his life attempted, 231; commands at battle of Laval, 234–41; 245

overruled in council, 246, 247 ; disputes with Talmont, 248; 251, 255, 256, 259, 261 ; at Granville, 266 *seq.* ; at Dol, 278–81, 283; 284 ; at siege of Angers, 292 *seq.* ; at La Flêche, 299 ; at Mans, 302 *seq.* ; 304, 308 ; crosses the Loire, 310 ; his death, 311
Rochejacquelein, Louis, marquis de La, 58 *note*, 304 *note*
Rochejacquelein, the marquise de La. *See* Lescure, Madame de
Roche-les-Murs, fight at, 146, 147
Rocher, Mercier du, 87, 129
Roland, Minister of the Interior, 17
Ronsin, 99, 132, 133, 165, 174
Rossignol, General, 131 ; his record, 132, 133; 163–65, 186, 189, 265, 281, 288, 290, 291, 295, 296, 297
Rostaing, 266
Rouarie, La, his plot, 52
Rouyer, Adjutant-General, 275
Royrand, General, chevalier de St. Louis, 48, 89, 90, 91, 92, 142, 146, 162, 206, 237, 266, 297

S

Saint-Hilaire, envoy from Jersey, 229
Sainte-Marie of Rhé, curé of, 280, 281
Sandoz, General, 81, 82, 83
Santerre, 48, 101, 102, 115, 134, 135, 163, 174
Sapinaud, Madame de, 147, 162, 163
Sapinaud de la Verrie, joins the rebels, 27, 28, 29 ; his forebodings, 47, 48 ; at Thouars, 71 ; 141 ; death, 146
Saulais, General de la, 52
Saumur, taken by royalists, 101 *seq.*
Savary, historian and officer, 36, 44, 99, 234, 290, 295, 304, 307, 308
Savenay, final battle at, 313 *seq.*
Saxe, Maurice de, 52
Sepher, General, 274
Simon, M. Jules, quoted, 4
Six-Sous, the gunner, 29, 31, 32, 43, 53, 54
Soyer, Major, 272
Stoffiet, royalist leader, 5, 26, 29, 48; at Thouars, 71 *seq.* ; 107, 108, 129, 173, 191, 205 ; at battle of Chollet, 206, 239, 259, 263, 264, 270, 271 ; at Dol, 278, 279, 292 ; at Mans, 303 ; crosses the Loire, 310, 311
Suette, Grande Armée at, 297

T

Tallien, 74
Talmont, Prince Philippe de, 5 ; joins the insurgents, 111, 112 ; at Nantes, 121 *seq* ; at Luçon, 158, 159; 185, 192, 194, 201, 206, 209, 213, 220, 228, 247 ; disputes with La Rochejacquelein, 248, 259 ; suspected of desertion, 271, 272 ; at Dol, 281, 283; 298 ; at Mans, 302; 311 ; leaves the Grande Armée, 313
Talot, republican adjutant-general, 133
Thoré, Madame, 303 and *note*
Thouars, attacked and taken by insurgents, 71 *seq.*
Tiffauges, Grande Armée at, 175
Tilly, 275
Tinténiac, his mission, 152–55, 262
Torfou, Grande Armée at battle of, 175 *seq.*
Trémoille, Abbé de la, 111
Trémoille, duc de la, 247
Tribout, General, 274, 276, 316
Turreau, General, 6, 55, 149
Turreau, representative, 189, 249, 288, 314

V

Vainqueurs de la Bastille, les, 38, 63,
Vergnes, chief of Canclaux' staff, 166, 167
Vihiers, battle at, 134, 135
Vimeux, General, 151, 189

W

Weissen, republican officer, 103
Westermann, General, 126, 131 ; 187, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 234, 235, 276 *seq.* ; 282, 297, 298, 299, 303, 305, 306, 311, 312, 313

PRINTED BY
HAZELL, WATSON AND VINEY, LD.,
LONDON AND AYLESBURY.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
BERKELEY

Return to desk from which borrowed.
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

MAY 31 1971 U 6

May'50CS

REC'D LD MAY 26 71 -9 AM 78

130ct'55BC

JAN 20 2006

OCT 9 1955 LD

3xJan'64CT

REC'D LD

JAN 16 '64 -12 M

DEC 2 1968 35

RECEIVED

DEC 4 '68 -10 PM

LOAN DEPT.

LD 21-100m-11,'49(B7146s16)476

274855

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY